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THE
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OF
JAMES TOWKER



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JAMES TOWKER

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THE CAPTIVITY
OF
JAMES TOWKER

BY
HENRY LLOYD



LONDON
JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

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THE CAPTIVITY OF JAMES TOWKER.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. James Towker, seeking a change of residence for economy's sake, is delivered into the hands of his enemy. His plans for escape miscarry.

THE establishment of Mr. James Towker was a small one, consisting simply of himself and his wife, but small as it was, it contrived to gather about and above it enough gloom to fill a gasometer.

It might be said of the Towkers that they had grilled gloom for breakfast, roast or boiled gloom for dinner, and cold gloom for supper. Towker smoked gloom in his pipe, and Mrs. Towker inhaled gloom from her rose trees. When

Towker lit the gas in the evening, there was illuminated gloom, and when the pair retired to rest, a counterpane of gloom covered their reposing forms.

It may not be out of place here to point out that gloom is one of the most expressive and artistic words we are in the habit of using. Look at it for a moment. Observe the horrible, open-mouthed, all-stomach'd G, a devouring, unsatisfied, never-filled letter; then comes the lank and starved l, fit for nothing so much as a side-post to a gallows, followed by o o, like the agonised expression of an unhappy wretch when he feels the dentist's instrument get hold of his eye-tooth; lastly crawls on to the scene the m, the most monotonous letter in the alphabet; a letter without a particle of adventure or excitement about it, and as uninteresting as a dead centipede. In sound, too, the word is as expressive as in construction. Try it on the baby, start with the thick end in the lower story of the larynx, and make the word as long as a ladder. Should the baby recover, there will be ample occasion for thankfulness.

Mr. Towker was in no wise to be blamed

for the sorrowful fog that enveloped him and his. It was all caused by the action of the Firm, whose fortunes he had assisted in building up for several years.

This misery-manufacturing Firm had, for reasons best known to itself, determined on reducing its expenses. Now a private individual who determines on reducing his expenses, finds it necessary to begin by cutting down his luxuries; but a Firm bent on reducing its expenses, commences by cutting down the luxuries of other people. Moral: Be a Firm.

"My dear Isabel," said James to his wife. "There is one thing we must do, and that is, move. Twenty pounds less a year to a man in my position is a serious loss. We must give up our snug little house here, and go into lodgings for a time at least. The Firm promises, if business betters, to restore us to our old salaries in a couple of years or so, and I hope for the best."

Isabel, being a sensible young woman, agreed to this course without a murmur, and Mr. Towker wrote the word "Apartments" on his sad heart, and kept his eyes open. He studied advertisements and window bills, and went in

various directions to look at different lodgings, but could not please himself; and at last turned the task over to his wife, and slept the better for so doing.

One evening on Towker's arrival home, Isabel met him with a smile. This, let it be said to the credit of the good little lady, was no more than James was accustomed to, and no more than he and all good men have a right to expect. O woman! tired, dejected, weary man needs it. Never leave it off, keep it ever on the bill of fare; let it not rust or get disjointed; meet us with a smile, even if behind you is concealed the short hair broom to take up the discussion at the point it was broken off after breakfast.

Isabel's smile, however, on the occasion referred to, was a different sort of smile to the usual one. It was a sort of surprise packet smile, and seemed to speak of good and pleasant revelations to be served up with the coming meal.

The fact was that Mrs. Towker had found apartments to her liking. Seeing an advertisement in the morning paper she had taken the train, boldly walked half a mile to the place

named, and been quite charmed with the apartments and their surroundings. Then she had taken the trouble to ascertain what a season ticket would cost, and now she was ready with her schedules A and B. Schedule A—Beautiful sitting-room, lovely bed-room, nice conservatory, pretty garden, charming summer-house, delightful landlady, rural walks, green fields, quiet, contentment, simplicity, peace. Terms low and favourable. Drawing-room, bed-room, and kitchen, with liberty to use conservatory, garden, and summer-house. Schedule B—Season-ticket £6 6s., service of trains, forty up and forty-two down.

Mr. Towker was satisfied, so satisfied in fact that he did not even trouble to run down and look at the apartments, but left his wife and the delightful landlady to settle all matters between them.

Mr. Towker, although he rented a whole house when he took unto himself a wife a few months before the Firm gave him a lesson in practical economy, did not put a great deal of furniture into it. He put in all he had certainly, but it required spreading out, and here and there some of his rooms or parts of

them looked desolate enough to let out to a social, or perhaps it should be written an unsocial, Robinson Crusoe.

It was Towker's intention to complete furnishing his house as he travelled along the journey of life, so that now when he came to move into his new abode, he found that by doubling up one table and secreting it under the bedstead, and putting two or three extra chairs in the kitchen, and rolling up one carpet and placing it in a corner of the conservatory, his two large rooms were not so greatly crowded.

The delightful landlady was confined to her room with a sick headache on the day the Towkers moved into her house, so that our friend James did not see her on that occasion. He saw her, however, the next day. On that eventful evening he arrived home, and after a short struggle with the strange latch-key entered the house at the same moment as the landlady arrived at the street door from the interior dressed to go abroad for business or pleasure.

Towker and his landlady stood transfixed. Figures on a twelfth-cake were never stiller. Whether they struck the attitudes or the atti-

tudes struck them, is of little consequence. It was perhaps more in the nature of a collision between two attitudes and two individuals. Anyhow, the attitudes remained masters of the situation. The two faces were studies. The look of the man told of both confusion and terror; astonishment was there, but it had to be content with a back seat in the presence of its more powerful companions. The lady's face started with a look of astonishment, which in one second was swallowed up in an expression of triumph, trimmed with a sort of border fringe of anticipated revenge.

It presently seemed to strike these two people simultaneously that the situation was not improving. This is not to be wondered at. Improvement must mean progress of some sort, if it is only backwards; and two persons standing stock still as if competing for situations in a waxwork show, naturally impede progression, and consequently put a stop to any improvement that may be doing its very hardest to come to the front.

Mr. Towker endeavoured to say something, but the words, if indeed they were ever formed, stuck to his tongue like flies to treacle, and

refused to leave it. The lady said, "Good evening, sir," as a pleasant and well-mannered landlady should to a good-looking lodger, and then slightly stooping forward hissed the one word "Monster!" into his ear like an infant torpedo, and proudly strode forth.

All that has been related occupied but a few seconds, and yet five minutes afterwards Isabel came downstairs to look for her husband. She had noted his approach from the window, and wondered why he had not, according to his usual custom, flown swiftly upstairs to give her a kiss.

When Isabel arrived on the scene she found her James looking very much in need of repairs, for he was sitting in a dejected and doubled-up attitude on the bottom stair, with his face buried in his hands. As Mr. T. was not in the habit of breaking his journey by sitting on the bottom stair or any other stair, any more than he was in the habit of sliding down the banisters or standing on his head on the hall mat, Isabel jumped in a moment to the conclusion that he had broken his leg, or back, or neck, or had gone suddenly demented, and naturally enough was terrified.

“James! James! Dear James!” she cried.
“Whatever is the matter? Are you ill?”

“A sudden faintness,” replied dear James, with a vain attempt at a smile; and it was a vain attempt, a chalk cow could have done as well. Then James shuddered, for he felt that though it was perfectly true he had experienced a sudden faintness, he was entering on a line of duplicity unpleasing to his conscience and containing elements of danger.

That evening Isabel went forth marketing, and Towker was left alone with his sorrow. He sat at the window, looking about as pleasant as a bilious ghost. Lightly tripping up the road came his landlady. The unhappy lodger caught sight of her, shuddered, groaned, and smote his forehead.

“Fool that I was,” he hoarsely muttered, “to move into a house without seeing the people. To dwell in the same house with *her*—’tis horrible!”

A word of explanation may not be out of place here.

In Mrs. Jubb, his landlady, Mr. Towker had recognised an old sweetheart—one Ethel May—from whom he had been compelled to part because of their mutual inability to agree. Ethel

possessed a most outrageous ill-temper, and that James Towker would not put up with, so a separation came about. Ethel did not want the engagement broken, but James did; so former vows were cancelled, tears were shed, fierce words spoken, and the bond was severed.

Then Ethel, to use a common but expressive phrase, showed her teeth.

To all Towker's friends that she knew she denounced that gentleman as a cold-blooded hypocrite, an outrageous monster, and a traitor of the deepest dye. Our unfortunate hero suffered much in consequence of this behaviour of his ex-sweetheart, and, in order to get rid of a circle of acquaintances that shuddered at his crimes, sought another postal district, and quite lost sight of Ethel, fondly hoping to see her never more; and now, alas! to his utter bewilderment and horror, he found himself living in the same house as Ethel, and in the subordinate position of a lodger.

Towker felt that the position lacked dignity, but this was a matter of little importance. It was quite evident that Ethel had not forgiven him, and now she was in a position to take her revenge. When the parting had taken

place Ethel had refused to return his letters, and some of these letters he knew were very loving indeed, and couched in terms which once appeared to him to be sublime, but which time and experience had since labelled ridiculous.

Isabel his wife was, as he knew, a very good little woman, but apt to be rather jealous of her James; and what the man now feared was that Mrs. Jubb would tell a fearful tale of heart-breaking villany on his part, substantiated to a certain extent by these letters, to his wife, and so ruin his domestic happiness.

A week or two as Mrs. Jubb's lodger was sufficient to make Towker feel that he was in an extremely uncomfortable predicament, and common sense told him that a change was extremely desirable. Mrs. Jubb availed herself of every opportunity to make his existence supremely miserable. As he passed the front parlour, where his landlady usually sat, crept he never so softly, the door would slightly open, a glittering eye would reveal itself to the gaze of Towker, and then came, like the hiss of a serpent, "Monster," "Traitor," or [some such modicum of Turkish delight. If he tried a consolatory pipe in the conservatory or garden,

things went on no better. While Isabel was with him, or within hearing distance, his landlady disturbed not his peace, but if he happened to be left by himself, Mrs. Jubb would mostly wander round his way to relieve her mind, and make her lodger wish himself dead twenty years ago. He held many consultations with himself, for he was the only person in the house to be trusted, but these consultations were always adjourned without producing any results. The real difficulty was to give a good and sufficient excuse to his wife for moving, without exciting her suspicions that there was a dark and horrid mystery underneath.

After an unusually long conference with himself one day, Towker decided that there must be some sort of drawback to his lodgings, and commenced to look about cunningly to find out what particular nuisance would condescend to come to the front first.

Never before did a man so fervently wish to find his habitation invaded by some sort of horror. A regiment of rats he would have hailed with tearful blessings. Armies of mice or cockroaches, or even a cloud of fleas, he would

have welcomed as a shipwrecked seaman welcomes a sail. But no, it was not to be; rats and mice seemed quite ignorant of the whereabouts of the house of Jubb. The place, in fact, seemed absolutely free from large or small vermin of any description. Finding nothing of the sort he was continually on the watch for, James began to study his habitation from a sanitary point of view, but he met with no better success. The drainage of the house was all that could be desired, and the water quite equal in purity to water supplied to householders generally. On one occasion his heart gave a great leap of joy, for he thought he had found a cause of complaint in the drinking water, but it fell again like a whimpering dog dropped into a well, when he discovered that a small piece of soap had accidentally found its way into the tumbler. Foiled in his own place, Towker took to studying the manners and customs of his neighbours, but there was nothing to complain of there. None of them kept fowls, ducks, or pigs, or any other noisy and objectionable creatures. Neither were any of them in the habit of coming home late at night and

creating disturbances by singing, yelling, shouting, or ringing harmless bells, and interfering with necessary knockers.

His particular misfortune altered Towker for the worse daily. We are frequently told by poets, philosophers, and preachers, that adversity and sorrowful days are good for a man. Doubtless, in many cases this statement is correct, but it was a coat that fitted not James. As there are specific remedies for particular disorders, so there are doubtless particular sorts of trouble that may do men good under certain conditions, but Towker was like a man with a broken leg being treated for a sore throat, and his medicinal adversity did him no good, but harm. Ordinarily he would have rejoiced in the perfection of every individual unit in the human family, but now it would have rejoiced his heart to find the man at the back getting intoxicated and beating his wife, the man on one side banging his family up to yelling point, the man on the other side trying to dig his way through the party wall with a pickaxe, and the man opposite throwing his furniture out of window, and firing pistols

into the air, for then he would doubtless be required by his wife to move. This sorrowful change was wrought on Towker by his misfortune, and the worst of it was, that, though his mind was embittered and his morals black-leaded, it was all to no purpose, for the neighbouring folk seemed to positively delight in the perfection of respectability. Neither inside nor outside of the Jubb establishment could poor Towker find the least excuse for flitting.

Night after night, when the Jubbs had retired to rest, did Towker descend to the kitchen, under the pretence of seeing to the bolts on the door; but this was only pretence. Arrived in the kitchen, he took out a small parcel of some high old cheese, and crumbs were broken off, and placed in cracks and corners where they would not be noticed; then one on this stair, and one on that, with an occasional rub of the nugget here and there right up to his own bed-chamber door, to make the trail complete; and then in the darkness the wretched man would lie awake and listen, till sleep overcame him; and even in his dreams he would murmur, "Not even a squeak." He felt strongly tempted more than once to purchase a few rats or mice,

and bring them home in his bag; but pallid fear prevented him from the commission of so great an act. Too many heroic points were in that game for Towker to handle. He was not of the stuff from which heroes are manufactured. He did on one occasion with much trembling secure a cockroach and place it in a small cardboard box, with the intention of giving it the run of Jubb's mansion, in hopes of creating a diversion in his favour. It was not a common cockroach, but an elephantine and most ferocious-looking creature, that came as a stowaway in the packing of some machinery from India. The body of the creature was between two or three inches long, while the antennæ which adorned its head looked capable of impaling one. On his railway journey home, a man opposite to Towker suddenly yelled, "Jee—rusalem; look at that!" Towker gave a jump, for on looking down, he found that the ugly beast had escaped from its prison, and was now crawling up his shirt-front, with the evident intention of having its next meal off chin. Towker knocked the horrible thing down, and the man opposite put his foot on it. So the Jubbs were saved.



CHAPTER II.

Secret torture is applied to the captive.

MR. TOWKER had not as yet met Mr. Jubb to speak to, as we commonly say. From his window he had seen him both enter and leave the house. He was a great hearty-looking fellow, with a loud voice. Towker was a small man, with a meek air and piping voice; so that there was quite a contrast between the landlord and the lodger.

One evening Towker, driven right up to the chalk line which separates despair from desperation by his landlady's persistent and diabolical persecution, determined on a personal interview, to see if he could not, in one way or another, put an end to it. It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Towker finished building up this resolve. Two or three times bricks fell

out, and threatened an over-toppling of the whole arrangement; but eventually he got it solid. He looked squarely at it, and said it would do. Isabel had run up to town to see her aunt, and would not be home till nine. Jubb had called out in his roaring voice to his wife, "Don't sit up, Ethel; I shall not be home till twelve." Two good hours thus placed themselves at the service of James Towker, and stood there waiting, wondering what he was going to do with them. Towker was wondering too.

The captive now lit his pipe, and calling a half-hearted swagger to his aid, proceeded down the stairs, opened the door of the conservatory, entered in, and banged the door after him, to show how utterly fearless he was. Mrs. Jubb could not well help hearing the noise occasioned by the slamming of the door, and probably looked upon this as a species of wooden gauntlet thrown down challenging her to conflict dire. At all events, two minutes later the landlady and her lodger stood face to face.

"I merely looked in to remark," began Mrs. Jubb, "that this conservatory is not built like a fortress. If you casually glance around, you

will see that the architectural fixings are delicate to a degree; so I must ask you, Mr. Towker, to close the door gently in future. Doors are not hearts, Mr. Towker. A man may break hearts and shatter hopes with impunity, but if he breaks a door or the panes of glass in it, he will probably be called upon to pay for the damage done."

"Now look you here, Ethel," said the unhappy Towker.

"Mrs. Jubb, if you please," interrupted the lady with dignity. "Ethel, indeed! From you, too."

"Mrs. Jubb, then, if you wish it," cried the lodger, turning very red in the face. "Whatever do you mean by behaving in this unnatural and foolish fashion?"

"What do you mean, sir, by invading the house of one you have so basely and cruelly deceived? I should have thought that shame—though I fear you have no sense of it—would have kept you away, if fear had not."

"Do you for one moment imagine I would have taken up my abode here," inquired Towker, "had I known it was your house? Certainly I would not. I came here thinking to find

strangers ; but I can soon rid you of my hateful presence. Give me notice to quit ; say, you want the rooms. I do not care what reason you give, I will go at once, and go gladly."

"Oh, no, you will not, Mr. Towker." This was said deliciously, slowly, softly, slyly ; but with a lower strata of hard and cruel meaning in it that boded no good to the lodger. "Oh, no, you will not, Mr. Towker ; you will stay here, and be my lodger—Ethel's lodger. Ha, ha, ha ! I intend to have some little revenge for my past injuries."

"But I will not stay !" shouted Towker fiercely, goaded to temporary insanity by the words and manner of Mrs. Jubb, and entirely forgetful of the fact that Isabel would require an explanation. "If you will not give me notice to go, I will give you notice that I shall quit. Surely I am as free to go as I was to come ?"

"To a looker-on, such may appear to be the case," replied the lady, "but if you analyse the conditions, you will be able to detect differences. This is what I mean. If you give me a week's notice to leave, I shall take the liberty of telling the story of your perfidy and

my wrongs to your dear Isabel. More than that I shall show her your letters to me, ("those cursed letters," groaned Towker) she will then discover the exact sort of perjured traitor she has for a husband, and must for ever afterwards simply abhor you. Listen, I can quote. I have been studying some of the precious documents this very afternoon, so that their contents are fresh in my memory. How would you like her to read this?—"My ever adored and dear darling Ethel, I am pining for a sight of your angel face. Oh, how I yearn for the joy-laden and rapturous time when there will be no need for us to dwell despairingly asunder.'"

"And now you want to leave." This was an interpolation, and nearly slew Towker on the spot. "'I love you,'" this was the quotation again, "'with a love that words are powerless to express, and thought powerless to grasp. Others may prove false, but I never can; I love you with a love that will last for ever.' How would you like your wife to read scores of letters like that, Mr. Towker? If she survived the prose I could call her attention to the poetry. Does she know you are a poet? This

is nice, Mr. Towker, is it not? I wonder you never issued a volume:

Though the gleaming stars may fall,
And the saline sea go dry;
I can ne'er be false, my love,
No, not I.

“Failure of ink, or inspiration, I presume, accounts for short weight in the last line; but no matter, let it pass. I’ve about three quires like it, I think, for Isabel.”

Mrs. Jubb paused for Mr. Towker to make any observation he felt inclined to, but James spoke not. He gave a great sigh which seemed to leave his clothes quite loose on his body. That was all.

“There is another reason,” continued Mrs. Jubb, “why I think you will not give me notice. My husband, who knows the story of your deception, does not know that my deceiver is his lodger—his and mine that is. When we were married he made a vow that if he ever met the false-tongued traitor, he would first horse-whip and then strangle him. Give me a week’s notice, and I shall introduce Mr. Towker to Mr. Jubb without any longer delay than would be necessary to procure the whip. In conclusion,

I should say that Mr. Jubb turns the scale at fifteen stone, and I should think you weigh about nine."

"Have you no mercy?" said Towker in a low tone, and with a desponding look on his face. "I should have thought the memory of former happy days would drive these fiendish thoughts from your mind."

"The memory of former days," cried Mrs. Jubb with sudden passion in her face and voice, "makes me feel as if I should like to kill you, you false villain. A week's notice. Shall I fetch you pen, ink, and paper? Ha! ha, revenge is sweet."

Mrs. Jubb sailed out of the conservatory, but there was no sailing power in the wreck of the Towker. He could have done with a tug-boat. How he drifted upstairs and came to anchor in his own dominions he hardly knew. When he thought of his wife reading all those letters teeming with expressions so strong that he presently fell to wondering where he could have got them from, he turned red, and when he thought of himself in the grasp of the huge and bloodthirsty Jubb, he turned white.

It was clear to him that he must not give a week's notice. He must stay with the Jubbs. "For how long?" moaned the wretched lodger. "Perhaps till I'm old and grey; the thought is horrible!"

The time went by, drearily enough to Towker. He felt like a male Mariana in the Moated Grange, or the Prisoner of Chillon. The circumstances of these persons were, he knew, very different to his, but they were all alike in having heart-break badly.

Among other things, Towker was sadly troubled concerning his habit of smoking. His wife did not like tobacco smoke in either her sitting-room or bed-room. In his former residence James had a nice little smoking-room to which he would occasionally retire, and come forth after awhile perfumed to his heart's content. In the house of Jubb he had looked forward to the conservatory or the kitchen. The conservatory he now discovered being open to the entrance of Mrs. Jubb was no place for a calm and meditative pipe. The kitchen of course he could use, closing the door to all comers; but the next room was a sort of superior kitchen, and it was

not pleasant for Towker while endeavouring to extract solace from the weed, to hear coming through the lath and plaster wall a series of triumphant chuckles from his enemy. He tried smoking at the staircase window with his head outside.

This performance lasted for two evenings only. On the third, as the poet puts it, he "heard a voice, the awful voice," not of "the blood-avenging sprite," but of his landlady. The voice was pitched in the pleasantest tone possible, and, as a popular song has it, "This is what she said."

"Mr. Towker, would you kindly mind smoking in the conservatory, the open window creates such a draught, and lets in all the dust."

The unhappy man closed the window, wishing he could let in a draught powerful enough to carry away, or enough dust to quietly smother this dreadful Ethel, and, extinguishing his pipe, fled to Isabel and safety. To add to his discomfort, his wife, seeing him wandering about looking as happy as if he'd sold his soul for five shillings and lost the money, asked him several times why he did not smoke in the conservatory or in the summer-house at the bottom of the garden.

The continued mention of the summer-house, at last set Towker thinking. If he could manage to steal down there quietly, without Mrs. Jubb being aware of the fact, he might be able to enjoy a quiet and satisfactory pipe.

The opportunity soon came, for the same evening as the thought occurred to the man, just at dusk Mrs. Jubb quitted the house. A few moments afterwards the lodger lit his pipe, and strolled down the garden. The interior of the summer-house was in darkness.

"She'll never suspect I'm here," thought Towker, as he passed through the doorway.

"Good evening, sir," cried a loud voice, and Towker almost fell over himself backwards, for he found he was in the presence of the man who had made a vow to first horsewhip and then strangle him—the great Jubb himself. "Nice place for a smoke, this," continued the landlord, in tones that made Towker think of a genial lion, or a good-tempered bull. "I wonder you don't use it oftener; I mostly come out here for a pipe or two in the evening: you should join me."

Jubb, Towker, and Co., thought the lodger

with a cold shiver sliding right down his back, through his calves, and into his boots. Then he said :

“Yes, I must come down here now and then.”

He knew the “now” was on, the “then” he pictured in the remote future.

“Do,” said Mr. Jubb, cheerily ; “I like a sociable chat, it does a man good, and gives him an appetite for supper.”

“Yes,” murmured Towker, feeling himself compelled to make some response. He felt no sudden rush of hunger, however.

Mr. Jubb and his lodger sat smoking for some time. The landlord did most of the talking, for the other man was engaged in bitterly deploring his captivity, and in dwelling on the cruel fate which had actually brought him to sit side by side with the very man who had pledged his honour to choke the existence out of him.

At length on the stillness of the evening, there came a sound like unto the shutting of a street door. Towker gave almost as great a start as he would have done if his finger had been pinched in the operation, for he truly

guessed that his tormentor had arrived home. Mr. Jubb heard the bang of the door with different feelings, for he was getting thirsty, and did not care to disturb himself to go to the ale barrel.

"Ethel, Ethel," he called out in his roaring fashion; "bring us a jug of ale, my dear, and two glasses, and don't be long, please."

Towker indulged himself in another shiver, but feeling that to dream of flight was hopeless, awaited his fate.

Presently Mrs. Jubb came down the garden, bearing in her hands a small tray; on this tray were two ale glasses, and a jug filled with the amber liquid. By this time the moon had climbed above the housetops, so that the garden and summer-house were very nicely illuminated.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Towker," cried Ethel sweetly; "I wondered who it was with my husband. I am so glad it is you; it is so nice to see people in the same house social and friendly. I'm sure we might be quite a happy family here. Allow me to pour out a glass of ale for you, Mr. Towker."

"Thank you," said the poor captive meekly.

He took the ale and felt his heart nearly bursting with mixed emotions, as courtesy compelled him to say some hypocritical something about his respect, and so forth, before he placed the ale to his lips.

Mrs. Jubb now returned for a brief space to the house, and Towker felt a little more at ease. But this was not to last for long, for his landlady soon reappeared with two additional ale glasses, and Mrs. James Towker. She had made it her business to trip lightly upstairs and tap at Isabel's door. When Isabel appeared she told her how nice it was out in the cool, soft, moonlit air, and how capitally Mr. Towker and Mr. Jubb were getting on together. Thus she persuaded the lady to add herself to the congregation, to Towker's increased misery.

Outwardly the four sat in peace, but there was little peace in the breast of James. He was filled with mixed feelings, but all unpleasant ones. He felt mad with Ethel that she should treat him as she did, mad with himself for not having taken more trouble before moving to ascertain where he was going to, mad with the Firm for causing him to move, and mad

with Jubb for being such a Hercules of a fellow. Here were four distinct and tearing vexations agitating the man. Then he had a fear lest Ethel, unable to withhold her spite, should now tell her story, a greater fear lest Isabel should hear and believe it, and a most tremendous and soul-sickening fear that Jubb, his big landlord, would proceed immediately after the recital of Ethel's woes to the sensational part of the business, necessitating flagellation and strangulation. Here were three distinct fears agitating the man. It might be thought by a mere on-looker that Towker was an individual of iron nerve to be able to sit so still and drink ale and smoke tobacco while these seven mental wild beasts prowled about his brain and roared along its corridors. But such was not the case ; he was simply helpless.

Whether Mrs. Jubb intended to let go her revelations in the summer-house remains to be seen ; but she evidently intended Mr. Towker to think that such was her intention, so as to add to his torture and her triumph. Whatever topic of conversation was started she managed to turn it so that the lodger found a sting in the tail of it.

Mr. Jubb had been relating the incidents attending the accidental break-down of a load of furniture, and wound up by saying: "The horse was the most wretched-looking bag of bones I have ever seen."

"Ah," said Mrs. Jubb with a sigh, "there are a great many horses working that ought not to be allowed to work; and how cruelly the drivers do beat them! It must be extremely painful to be horsewhipped as they are; don't you think so, Mr. Towker?"

"Extremely so," replied her victim, as in imagination he wriggled in the grasp of Jubb, and tried to save his back by dodging.

Towker, to turn the conversation, spoke of a robbery that had recently been committed in the neighbourhood—a robbery in which the victim had been a good deal knocked about.

"Now, suppose he dies," said James; "I should think it would go hard with the robber. I'm glad he's caught."

"If the man dies," replied Jubb, "the jury will, I should think, bring it in wilful murder, and hang the villain."

Mrs. Jubb gave a little start, and a small scream, and said shudderingly: "Oh, how awful

to think of! It must be a terrible death. They say it does not last long. I wonder if it is like drowning, where all your life passes before you. That must be very shocking, especially to a man with guilt on his conscience. Strangulation anyhow must be very awful, don't you think so, Mr. Towker?"

The unhappy James replied, "Yes," in a very low tone indeed. He had his eye on the garden wall, and was wondering if he could vault over it, and so get the start of Jubb, if Ethel denounced him.

Presently Isabel said plaintively: "What a lovely night! A night for painters and poets to take delight in."

"And lovers," murmured Mrs. Jubb archly; then assuming a deeper tone she continued: "I wonder how many vows now being made in the light of the moon will be kept, and how many broken. It is very sad to reflect on the faithlessness of man."

James had made his preparations, the table was movable, he would jam Mr. and Mrs. Jubb over in their corner with that piece of furniture, and then rush through the house to the police station and claim protection. What

indeed was exposure to a back like a sheet of music paper, and a dislocated larynx. He would not be sacrificed if his legs could save him.

"Go it," cried Jubb, laughing, and blowing out a cloud of smoke. "One would think women never deceived, to hear you. You're thinking of that fellow that played you false. I wonder where he is now."

Towker felt his heart jump into his mouth, and his courage drop into his boots, for fear Ethel should, with an accusing finger, cry, "There he is;" but for all that, he kept his two hands on the table ready for the jamming of the Jubbs, and his eye on the back door.

"Forget him, my dear," continued Jubb, "and be content with me; I shall never deceive you."

"You had better not," cried Ethel, with some asperity, and with a glimmer in her eye of the electric light the lodger knew so well.

Shortly after this, Isabel said she felt chilly; so, after all Towker's fright, the party was allowed to break up without Ethel setting forth the story of her woes.

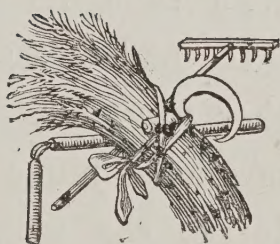
"No more summer-house for me," whispered

James to Towker, as he sadly crept up the moonlit staircase to his own apartments, and he ever after avoided it, as if its foundations were on dynamite, and its occupants rattlesnakes. The conservatory, too, he avoided, as if it had the plague in every flower-pot; but, for all his care, cruel Mrs. Jubb never lost an opportunity of tormenting her former lover, by a look, word, or gesture of disdain, whenever their paths crossed.

The man was utterly miserable, and knew not what to do; sometimes he wildly thought he would be a ghost and clank a chain about the house all in the drear midnight, and so frighten the Jubbs and make them move, but he must either take his wife into his confidence or perhaps frighten her to death, so he abandoned the idea of becoming a spectre. At other times he attempted to screw his courage up to defy his fate. In imagination he saw himself in the back garden with expanded chest and head thrown well back. Before him stood Jubb, Mrs. Jubb, and Isabel; in his left hand he held a deed of separation correctly drawn up, and all ready for signatures in case of Isabel insisting on parting. In his right hand he

held a revolver guaranteed to make six holes in Jubb, if the firing was rapid. In his eye was a glance of defiance for Mrs. Jubb, as he loudly cried, "I am Towker, the Towker that according to her account deceived Ethel May, now Mrs. Jubb; bring forth the documents and do your worst."

This interesting scene, however, never occurred, saving in imagination.





CHAPTER III.

Mr. Jurdon is brought in by his cold, Tolliger dragged in by his ears, and Mrs. Wimple nearly sent out by a novel experiment in tea-making.

SOME few weeks after the little party in the summer-house, Mrs. Towker presented her husband with a son, and this to a certain extent took Towker's thoughts off his unhappy position. It added to his discomfort though in another way, for, as if Mrs. Jubb thought the professional nurse was incompetent to fulfil her duties, she took the liberty of popping up several times during the day to see how the mother and infant were getting on. Of course some of these visits were made in the evening, and James never felt sure that he would not encounter Mrs. Jubb on the stairs or landing-place whenever he ventured out of the

sitting-room. He therefore took the liberty, although of a stay-at-home nature, to go out for a stroll for two or three hours and smoke his pipe abroad. One evening it came on to rain rather fiercely, and he for shelter fled into "The White Owl," an old-fashioned respectable inn that stood in the High Street. Here he made his way into the smoking-room, and after ordering a glass of ale sat down to enjoy his pipe.

There were about a dozen men in the room drinking, smoking, and conversing; all were seemingly in good spirits, but none of them were by any means intoxicated. One whose name he learned afterwards was Mr. Jurdon, was complaining in rather a loud voice to the company generally that he was not well, and some one ventured to ask him to describe his symptoms.

"Well," replied Jurdon, "about the lower ribs, especially on the right side, I feel as if there was a waggon-load of hay trying to get through an archway too small to allow a free passage."

"Is it continual or intermittent?" demanded his interrogator.

"You might term it continually intermittent," replied Jurdon; "for if the driver does sit down to rest for a moment, one of the horses begins to kick."

"Do you cough, and if so, does that affect the waggon-load of hay?"

"Cough, yes," replied the invalid; "when I cough the driver gets hold of both horses by their heads, seven men and a boy get hold of the wheels, and push behind, and the concern goes up against the sides and roof of the archway till I expect to have the whole fabric down."

"Do you suffer at all anywhere else?"

"There are my shoulders," answered the patient. "I feel as if I'd let them out as dog kennels, and the dogs were trying to eat their way out. This feeling grows so bad at night that I catch myself trying to hear them bark."

"Anything else?"

"There's my neck. I feel as if I'd one of Chubb's safes built round it; and my throat, that feels as if I'd swallowed the Fleet Street Dragon, spikes and all, and as if he'd left the spiky end of his tail in my larynx."

"It is a bad cold," said his interrogator ;
"a bad cold, with a sore throat, touch of
rheumatism, and disordered liver."

"Oh, is that all ? Cold, sore throat, rheumatism, liver ; you couldn't while you're about it fling in a few more items, could you ? Not so much to make me feel proud, you know, as to enable me to fix up a good letter to my friends in the country. My bones are all here, I suppose, and not anything more serious than usual the matter with my corns ? I don't feel balder than I did a month ago ; but if you notice anything wrong with my phrenological development, don't be above mentioning it. Do not allow false pride to hold back anything unusual about my ears, or the accustomed jovial glare in my eye."

"My dear fellow," cried his friend laughing, "do not get excited. I know you are not a teetotaller, but a change of stimulants may do you good. You may not have tried hot rum going to bed."

"I have tried hot rum," said Jurdon.

"And I suppose it produced no effect."

"No effect," came like an echo from the lips of Jurdon. Then he continued : "I only

tried to open my door with a meerschaum pipe, and broke it. No effect ! I only had to knock up the folks at home to let me in, fell over the dog, dropped my hat and sat on it, broke the decanter and tumbler, put my boots on the window ledge instead of outside the door, set fire to the bed curtains, and finally got out of the trap-door, and sang 'Tom Bowling' to an assemblage of cats, in my night shirt. Tempter, avaunt ! I'll none of thee."

The assembled company laughed, and Towker joined them. Jurdon was evidently a "character" in his way. Presently, espying Towker, he crossed the room, and said : "And how are you, sir ? New comer, sir ? Like our neighbourhood ? I've seen you pass my door, to the station ; take my card, sir, happy to serve you at any time." Towker thanked Mr. Jurdon, replied civilly as to the state of his health, and Jurdon retired to the fire-place to get a light for his cigar. Mr. Towker, on glancing at the card, found that Jurdon's other name was Joshua, and that he was a builder and undertaker.

Presently the door opened, a face peeped into the room, closely scanned all present, and

retired. Several members of the company smiled, and murmured, "Tolliger."

"Did you notice his ears?" inquired Jurdon, returning to Towker.

"I did not," replied the gentleman addressed.

"Phenomenal," said Jurdon. "Simply enormous! Even as a boy at school they were of such extraordinary dimensions that he was christened the African elephant; of course the poor fellow is to be pitied. At a public meeting the other night, Tolliger ventured to call out, 'Hear, hear,' and a rude boy yelled, 'He's got 'em all on.' Not long ago he went to be re-vaccinated, and the doctor gave him an extra dig on both arms on account of the size of his ears."

Towker swallowed as much of this as he thought would do him good.

"Did you ever hear——" broke in another individual, a Mr. Mumley, addressing the room, "how the Glee Club served him last year?"

Some had heard, and some had not, so Mr. Mumley spoke as follows:

"The Glee Club meets, as most of you know, in the long room upstairs. The admission is to members only, save on special occasions,

when the members issue tickets to their friends and give a concert. Now Tolliger was a regular attendant at all the rehearsals, although he did not enter the room, being, as you know, too mean to pay half-a-guinea for a year's subscription. The way he managed to hear the music was like this, he stood outside the door which had then a small peephole in it about the size of a five-shilling piece. Over this, inside the room, had been a shifting plate, but by some means this had been removed. On practice nights, Tolliger would stand outside the door with his ear to this aperture and drink in the music for nothing. The club practised at the further end of the room, and when he heard any one approaching either from the room or up the stairs, he simply popped up three steps into the billiard-room.

“One evening they were singing something very softly when little Jones the alto burst into a snigger, and cried in a whisper, pointing to the door at the same time, ‘Look at that.’ All looked, but at a word and wink from the conductor sang through the piece without breaking down; then they had a roaring chorus ‘Rule Britannia,’ or something of

that sort, and under cover of the uproar had their laugh out.

"The joke was this. Tolliger finding the soft strains of music were very nice but rather difficult to catch, had folded or rolled up one of his ears and poked it through the peep-hole; once through, it flew back to correct shape again, so that the club was nearly choked at the sight of a No. 17 ear apparently growing on the surface of the door.

On the next practice night two or three tubes of oil colours, two or three brushes and a small palette appeared on the scene. Shortly after practice commenced, Tolliger arrived and the bait was ready for him. The conductor announced his intention of having the soft and pretty chorus, or whatever it was that they tried on the previous occasion. This was sung softer than ever, and presently the ear shot through and opened like an umbrella. A member of the club, renowned for his powerful grip, had been told off for this special duty, and at once secured the portion of Tolliger that was trespassing. There was an unearthly yell, and in about three seconds the ear was artistically coloured; centre green, outside edge

vermilion, and the rest yellow. They say it looked lovely. The man who had hold of it then let go and it flew out of the hole like a frightened bird. Tolliger applied his mouth to the peep-hole and yelled: 'You're a beastly lot of cads, you're a——' but he got no further, for finding three paint brushes in his mouth, he fled in horror. He was not seen here for several weeks—but he got over it."

Towker, as the night turned out quite wet, spent a considerable time in the smoking-room at "The White Owl," but at ten o'clock arose, and bade the company "Good-night." On arriving home, after partaking of a modest supper of bread and cheese, he said "Good-night" to his wife and baby, and retired to rest on the made-up bed in his sitting room. He felt in better spirits than he had known for a long time, and announced his intention to himself of again visiting "The White Owl" at no very distant date.

All was quiet in the house when he retired to rest, and he fully expected a good night's sleep, but here he was bound to be disappointed. About three o'clock in the morning he was awakened by a sound of some one rapping

at the wall. This wall was the separating barrier between his sitting-room and bed-room, and he at once jumped to the conclusion that something was wrong, either with his wife or baby, or the nurse. Slipping on his clothes, he tapped at the bed-room door. "Come in," cried his wife. As soon as he arrived inside, Isabel said: "Oh, James, I do wish you would go down into the kitchen and see after nurse; she slipped out a short time ago, and I fancy something must be the matter with her. Don't you hear a peculiar noise?"

"I'll run down," said James, "and soon find out."

Arrived in the kitchen, James lit the gas and looked round. There lay the poor old nurse flat on her back; at intervals she cried, "Wook!" Towker was puzzled, not to say alarmed. Up to the present time she seemed to have had no desire to lie on the floor and cry "Wook!" Of course the desire might have been coming on gradually, this being the climax.

Towker did not like the look of her eyes. The expression was not a glare, but it was

different to what was ordinarily discoverable there. While too bilious to denote insanity, it was too vague to place to the account of bile simply. The whole affair was a mystery. The old lady was pale, more than pale in fact. This was peculiar. Ordinarily she possessed cheeks like a sunset by Turner, now they were of the sad hue the winter snow entertains when the cook has thrown over it the water the green stuff has been boiled in.

“Wook!” cried the unfortunate nurse again. This was simply a frightful “wook.” The one previous seemed to be expostulatory with a touch of interrogation about it. This was a “wook” whose component parts consisted of calamity and physical pain, with an undertone of mental anguish difficult to conceive, and impossible to describe. Yet what could it mean? Mr. Towker had read of persons who in a state of lunacy spoke languages learned in infancy and since forgotten, but he doubted if anything like the sound the nurse gave utterance to existed in any language other than a wild Indian’s war-whoop, and he felt perfectly satisfied that Mrs. Wimple the nurse had never been engaged in scalp-hunting. “Wook” could

not be construed into a threat, the physical incapacity of its utterer exploded that idea in a moment.

"Wook," again, this time worse than ever. Towker absolutely shivered. The speaker, or rather the wooker, seemed to have gone down into the cellar to fetch up the mysterious syllable. This made it sepulchral. Then she seemed to have pressed into the development of this "wook" all her digestive and vital organs, besides all her ribs, long, short, and floating. This gave a breadth to the ejaculation that shook the crockery on the dresser shelves. Mr. Towker felt extremely puzzled how to act. His good wife could render him no assistance, while it was impossible to expect assistance from a baby a few days old. He thought of appealing to the Jubbs, but flung that thought away, hoping presently to see Mrs. Wimple come round and behave in her ordinary manner. To his great delight the "wooks" grew fainter, and then the old lady suddenly drew herself up to a sitting posture by the aid of Towker's arm.

"Whatever is the matter, Mrs. Wimple?" inquired James anxiously.

The nurse looked at him for a moment in a half-dazed fashion, and then said faintly :

“I’ve poisoned myself.”

“Poisoned? Good gracious!” cried Towker in horror, as he thought of inquests, haunted houses, ghostly nurses, and supernatural wooks.

“Whatever have you taken?”

“Oh, that tea, that tea!” sobbed the poor old lady, as she pointed to a little black teapot on the table. “Smell it, but don’t taste it.”

Towker, having smelled the fatal draught, said: “Dear me! Wherever did you get this?”

“I came down in the dark,” replied the nurse, “and lit the little gas stove, to make myself a cup of tea. I could not lay my hand on the tea-caddy, but found some tea done up in paper. That is to say, I thought it was tea by the feel of it; but I neglected to smell it. I made it, and put in the milk and sugar, and took a good drink. Wook!”

Hastily Mr. Towker looked round, and on the floor he found a paper that overnight had held nearly an ounce of rather dry cut cavendish.

With the aid of some warm water and a

little mustard, the nurse soon came right round, and was herself again.

Greatly agitated by this occurrence, and devoutly grateful that it had terminated so well, Towker having heard no sign of the Jubbs being disturbed, concluded to smoke a pipe before climbing the stairs again.

He had smoked for about ten minutes, when to his horror the door was pushed open, and Mrs. Jubb entered, fully dressed. Towker made an ineffectual attempt to disguise the fact that he'd no collar on, and that his hair was rumpled all over his head.

"Wretched man—or I should say scarecrow!" hissed Ethel. "Just escaped being a murderer, and now you sit and smoke your pipe as if nothing had occurred. You ought to be on your knees, thanking Heaven that that poor old lady is not a corpse, and you a murderer. I know all about it, for I heard her groaning as she passed my door, and asked her what had happened. Here's the whole house disturbed, for Jubb is awake and growling like a bear; your poor wife frightened to death, for I've been upstairs; my rest spoiled; and Mrs. Wimple nearly dead; and there you sit, a

picture of hardened atrocity. Wretch!" And she was gone.

Mrs. Jubb's idea of a picture of hardened atrocity was peculiar. Had a portrait of Towker been taken there and then, and been labelled "An impenitent desperado," the looker-on must have smiled.

The hardened sinner thought it best to beat a retreat before he had a visit from the other Jubb, so, placing his unfinished pipe on the mantelpiece, he crawled upstairs to bed, his boots in his hand.





CHAPTER IV.

More of Mr. Tolliger. Some account of Mr. Pommer's birthday, and a dastardly attempt to stab Towker with a *Magnum Bonum*.

SOME two or three weeks after Mrs. Wimple's novel experiment in tea-tasting, Isabel said to her husband: "We are going to have another lodger in the house, James. Mrs. Jubb has let the top front room furnished to a single gentleman. She tells me that she now intends to get rid of her small servant and have a larger one."

"Oh," said Towker, "I wonder what sort of a fellow we shall have upstairs," hope for a moment fluttering in his breast and murmuring: "He may prove himself a nuisance, or, by judicious training, made to become one."

"James, take care of thy moral backsliding!

Dream not of persuading indirectly this new-coming lodger to experiments in firework making, or of filling him up with gratuitous whisky till he becomes a victim to delirium tremens."

Hideous as it may seem, some such thoughts flashed through the brain of Towker while Isabel was telling him the news. But again came that greatest of all incentives to correct behaviour—fear—to his aid; and well it might. Towker, gazing upon the infant edition of himself with a father's love in his heart, felt that he dare not make any move that was labelled "Dangerous."

The Jubbs' new lodger turned out to be Mr. Tolliger, the man with the ears. He had become dissatisfied with his old lodgings for some reason, and sought and obtained new ones. Towker determined to cultivate the acquaintanceship of Mr. Tolliger, arguing that a friend in the house might some day prove useful to him. He therefore contrived to meet him on the stairs, and presently, ascertaining that he was a pipe-smoker, he consulted him concerning a pipe he had that would not colour. Then he introduced a bit of rare tobacco he'd

got hold of, and in the course of a few days these two men became very friendly.

Towker was pleased at this arrangement, because Tolliger frequently asked him upstairs to have a friendly pipe—which, by the way, he mostly took out of Towker's pouch; but as he in return gave Towker plenty of information about all the prominent people in the neighbourhood, James was very well contented to pay so small a fee.

Tolliger's great infirmity, as he confessed to Towker, was curiosity. He seemed to be possessed with an intolerable desire to know everything about everybody.

Perceiving this, artful Towker apparently fell into the trap, and opened up what Tolliger took to be his life history, but the delicate relations previously existing between himself and Mrs. Jubb, Towker, of course, carefully concealed. Tolliger knew all about the Jubbs, or professed to, and Towker learned that Jubb was a great, good-tempered fellow, devoted to his wife, and humouring her in every way. Tolliger described Mrs. Jubb as a woman of great determination, with, at times, a violent temper, he knowing a good deal of the private

history of the Jubbs', gathered from various sources in his detective-like fashion.

Said Tolliger one evening: "I recollect many years ago suffering from this curiosity of mine. I was out with some of my young companions (I was about seventeen years of age), when the conversation happened to turn on the subject of walking, and one of my chums remarked, 'As to Tolliger, he walks like a cat on hot bricks.' This is, as you know, a time-honoured expression, and valuable only on account of its age. But nevertheless I disliked the figure; then again, it puzzled me; I seemed to myself to walk in an ordinary fashion, but feared that such was not the case, or the unpleasant comparison would never have been made. The question I kept putting to myself was: What peculiar style of walking does a cat affect when on hot bricks?

"At last, as my imagination would not help me, I determined to find out in a practical fashion. There was a cat at home, bricks were not difficult to obtain, and I could speedily heat them in the large oven, and on the hobs at home.

“Adjoining our larder there was a sort of little lumber-room with a stone floor. I cleared out what few odds and ends there were, and borrowed a sufficient number of bricks to fairly cover this floor. I recollect choosing a Sunday afternoon for the experiment. The servant had gone out, and the old folks were taking a nap, so all was ready for the experiment. Some bricks I placed in the oven, some on top, and disposed others in various positions about the range, and in about half-an-hour I had them all nice and hot. Then, with a pair of tongs, I conveyed them separately into the little room I have mentioned, and neatly paved it. When they cooled a bit (for I did not want to hurt the cat), I got hold of puss. Into the little room I went and carefully closed the door behind me. The cat was purring in my arms, and all was ready; there was no table or chair for her to jump upon, so it seemed absolutely certain that she must walk, and I intended to closely watch her, and carefully note any peculiarities of gait, so that I might be in a position to avoid them in my own pedestrian exercises.

Then I dropped the cat, but no sooner did her feet touch the hot bricks, than she seemed to smell danger; she uttered a squall of fierce alarm, and with all her toenails at full cock, sprang at my waistcoat. There she anchored for a moment, but as I found about ten of her talons sticking into my thighs, I shook her off. Even then she declined to walk, but made another bound at me, and landed with a squeal on my shirt-front and shoulders: there was a desperate bit of work then, cat over my head, cat down my back, cat, cat everywhere but on the hot bricks. At last I managed to wrench open the door, and sailed out into the garden with the cat on my shoulders. As well as I remember her teeth were buried in my hair, one front paw was in my left ear, the other down my neck, while her hind feet were vaccinating my shoulder-blades like a school of medical students operating on a community at the rate of twelve a shilling; and after all," concluded Tolliger, as he helped himself to another pipe of tobacco from Towker's pouch, "I never discovered how a cat walked on hot bricks."

Towker's life began to be a little more

tolerable now. Having the freedom as it were of Tolliger's apartment, and the warmth and comfort of the smoking room at "The White Owl," he at times forgot his peculiar position, but Mrs. Jubb did not, constantly making opportunities to taunt and sneer at her prisoner.

One Friday evening Towker found an unusually large concourse at "The White Owl." One of the regular customers had on the previous evening announced that the morrow was his birthday, and that he should like to see a goodly number of his friends assemble together to drink his health. Towker's countenance fell a little when he found Mr. Jubb present, but as Mrs. Jubb was at home, and Tolliger, Towker's sworn crony by this time, at his elbow, he had no fear. Jubb held out his hand, and gave Towker a hearty shake, regretting that he did not see more of him. "However," cried Jubb, "we shall meet more now; my busy nights in town are over for the season, and I shall drop in here oftener."

James did not feel very well pleased at this arrangement, but muttered something about "Very glad," and so the matter dropped.

Mr. Pommer, whose fiftieth birthday it was,

possessed a complexion rather pronounced, especially about the region of the nose. This feature was large, and of no particular pattern. It had been irreverently compared to Vesuvius rising out of the Red Sea with sunset effects. Geographical looseness is discoverable in the simile, but as perfection is seldom attainable in figurative speech, it may be allowed to pass. The man's mouth was large, and he mostly wore it a little way open.

Pommer was a man not greatly endowed with cunning, and far too apt to listen to advice, and also to follow it. Advice, especially advice gratis, is not always to be followed with impunity. In many cases, advice, if followed at all, should be followed at a distance. The follower then may have an opportunity, if things begin to look queer, of turning up a side street, and letting advice go ahead and lose itself.

One little anecdote concerning Mr. Pommer will serve to show that he was a man not hard to impose upon. The incident was still fresh in the recollection of Tolliger, who related it to Towker.

A fatal case of apoplexy had occurred in the

neighbourhood, and conversation having turned upon it at "The White Owl," one of the company, who professed to know a good deal, said: "Whenever a man sees things he should not see—that is to say, sees things as they are not—he should at once seek medical advice. If it seems to him that a tree, or a post, or a pump, or a man is curiously or unnaturally distorted, then he should, for safety's sake, believe that this unnatural distortion exists in his own brain, and at once go to his doctor, as an hour's delay may prove fatal."

Joe Parker, a waggish individual, heard these remarks, and noticed at the same time that Mr. Pommer was drinking them in as the thirsty earth drinks in rain.

A few evenings after, Joe saw Mr. Pommer in the road ahead of him, and resolved on an experiment.

Mr. Pommer was rather fond of his glass, and on the occasion referred to had had quite as much as was good for him.

Joe, by popping up one street and down another at a fast pace, managed to get in front of Pommer by something like twenty yards. Pommer knew Joe by sight, but as he was not

an intimate acquaintance made no attempt to overtake him ; but gazed upon him in a vacant sort of fashion.

“That is strange,” said Pommer to himself. “I never noticed that young man was deformed before.” Such was the case however, for Joe had his left shoulder well up to his ear, while his right was depressed in the opposite direction. “Poor fellow !” said Pommer, as he ceased to watch him for a second or two. When he looked up again, he felt puzzled. “I could have sworn,” said he, “that that hump was on his left shoulder, but it is on his right.” And so it was, while his left seemed as if it was going to slip off altogether.

“Very singular, and—and—bless me,” continued Pommer ; “the poor fellow is knock-kneed. Why, goodness gracious !” and Pommer nearly fell down with astonishment, for the hump had returned to Joe’s left shoulder ; while, instead of being knock-kneed, he was bow-legged as a bulldog, with his toes turned well in.

Pommer continued to look with his eyes nearly starting from their sockets, for a moment or two after, Joe was going along hoppity-lop, hoppity-lop, with one leg about four inches

shorter than the other. The puzzled man could stand it no longer, but started at a little trot to catch up to Joe. Joe, with his ears on the alert, heard him coming and gradually subsided into his correct shape, so that by the time Mr. Pommer was within six yards of him, Joe was without any hump or extravagance of any sort.

Mr. Pommer stopped and gasped. Joe went on, and when he found, by a swift backward glance which he obtained by a pretended look after a flying pigeon, that Pommer was well to the rear, he recommenced his quaint exercises, varying them with an occasional waddle all over the pavement.

Mr. Pommer waited no longer, but muttering, "Apoplexy, sure enough!" made for his medical man as fast as his legs could carry him, firmly convinced that premonitory symptoms had made a start.

It is not necessary to go into particulars of how the evening was spent. Pommer was toasted, as one of his friends observed, "almost to a cinder." The voice of song was also heard, besides speech-making and joke-making, and many were the grogs that found graves.

The end of the evening found Pommer and several others the worse for wear.

As the company filed out just before closing time, Mr. Pommer came into rather violent collision with a man who was making a desperate effort to obtain a drink at the bar before it was too late. This particular man, Pommer rather disliked. He was, by trade, a printer, and was a gruff, unsociable person. His name was James Batter, but his usual title was "Sulky Jim."

"Where are you coming to?" shouted Pommer, as Jim's elbow caught him among the floating ribs, and sent a sort of earthquake wave along his diaphragm. Sulky Jim made no reply, but, having reached the counter, called for, and obtained a glass of whisky and water, and proceeded to drink it. By the time this feat was accomplished, closing time had arrived, and all customers were induced to depart. The birthday gathering and casual drinkers made quite a crowd in the street.

Pommer, acting on the advice of some of his mischievous friends, was waiting till Batter came out, to have what is commonly

termed a row. "Now then, you blundering booby," cried Pommer as the printer issued from the door, "what do you mean by knocking a respectable citizen about in such a fashion?"

"You should get out of the way then," growled Jim the Sulky. "If you can't walk, go home in a wheelbarrow, and not stand about like a petrified porpoise."

"Porpoise! I'll porpoise you," screamed Pommer. "Take that, and that;" and he planted an admonitory tap or two on the printer's nose.

The printer simply knocked Pommer over without troubling himself to make any preliminary remarks.

Pommer arose in a fury, but his friends thinking that the quarrel had gone far enough, held him back and bundled the printer off as quickly as possible.

Pommer's blood was up, and his rage was really dreadful to witness. The terrible fury of immature whisky rolled through the man's soul like a huge tidal wave, and swept before it every feeling of mercy, pity, and benevolence.

"You scoundrel," he shrieked; "I'll kill

you, I'll murder you, I'll have your blood!" Then he fell a-sobbing, and was led home, or part of the way home by his friends, muttering:

"Porpoise, I'll porpoise him!"

Suddenly he paused, and taking from his pocket a gardener's knife, he opened it and said solemnly:

"If I could have got this out, I'd ha' carved him into scallops;" and he hissed out "scallops" in such a fiendish tone, that his friends fairly shuddered, and one of them snatched away the knife and closed it. "Gi' me my knife!" cried Pommer angrily. "Gi' me my knife!"

"All right," said his friend; "there, I've put it in your pocket."

As they were now within a short distance of Pommer's abode, a general shaking of hands took place, and the party broke up, leaving that irate gentleman to finish his journey alone.

Messrs. Jubb, Towker, and Tolliger went home arm-in-arm. Towker, perhaps, suffered most from the effects of the evening, as ordinarily a glass or two of ale satisfied him;

but in order that Pommer might be properly toasted, he had, as he said on this occasion only, indulged in two or three glasses of sherry, and one or two of whisky and water. He therefore, as far as steadiness went, felt not so well as usual, but as for hilarity, he was full of it, and slapped Jubb on the shoulder (he could just fairly reach it), and called him a "dear old pal," and Tolliger another, and willingly accepted Jubb's invitation to come downstairs to tea with his wife and baby on Sunday afternoon, a promise which he afterwards regretted.

Towker, in the morning, felt that Pommer's birthday had done Towker no good, and he took more repentance than anything else at breakfast.

After he had said "Good-bye," and kissed his wife and baby, he proceeded downstairs on his way to the street-door. He was not, however, permitted to go forth without interruption, for Mrs. Jubb suddenly emerged from her sitting-room, placed a note in his hand, and swept haughtily past him.

This note, which Towker read more than once during the day, ran as follows :

“SIR,

“Possibly you are astonished at my writing to you, and well you may be. I consider you a creature too useless and contemptible (save for mischief) to occupy the thoughts of any sensible woman. Still, I must protect myself and my establishment from danger, even at the risk of lowering myself by addressing this letter to you. Mr. Jubb is essentially a sober man, and never takes the liberty of getting intoxicated. Mr. Tolliger, my lodger, is also as amiable and temperate a gentleman as one could wish to see. Now, what has happened? With diabolical thoughts of doing me mischief, you induce these two gentlemen to become intoxicated, while you yourself retain your sobriety to gaze upon the wrecks of better men than you can ever hope to be. Mr. Jubb is still sleeping off the effects of his debauch, while poor Mr. Tolliger has rung his bell for a cup of strong tea without milk or sugar, showing how he is. *Now, mark you this:* If ever such a disgraceful affair happens again, you may guess what my determination is—I shall not wait for you to give a week’s notice.

“E. J.”

To say that Towker was astonished quite fails to portray his state of mind. He was overwhelmed in a sea of amazement, where the raging billows of bewilderment buffeted him and knocked him under to such a tune that all he could do was to come up now and then and gasp.

Having managed to escape from this flood only just undrowned, he sat on the shore to think. What course of action should he take—any or none? There was one consolatory point in the note, and that was the accusation that he kept himself sober. Towker knew he was as bad, if not worse, than Jubb and Tolliger, but Ethel apparently did not; and Towker reckoned this as one chalk to him. He determined not to write; Mrs. Jubb should have no more literary contributions from him. The course of action he adopted was simple and dignified, but he somehow felt that he got the worst of it.

When he opened the street door in the afternoon he wiped his feet strenuously on the mat, and made a clatter by dropping his walking-stick.

This produced the desired effect, for Mrs. Jubb came forth.

Towker handed her her own note, and said with a bow :

“ I am at a loss, Mrs. Jubb, to know why you accuse me of making Mr. Jubb and Mr. Tolliger intoxicated. I assure you that neither of those gentlemen had a single glass at my expense.”

“ Oh, indeed !” said Mrs. Jubb, taking her note and holding it by one corner slightly, as if it needed disinfection after contact with Mr. Towker. “ How foolish I was to suspect you ! I might have known that you were too mean to treat any one, even a landlord or a fellow-lodger ;” and she passed into her own domain.





CHAPTER V.

The seriousness of the affair warranting such treatment, a full account is given of the termination of Mr. Pommer's birthday treat. [This chapter is tragic.]

LEAVING Towker to reflect on his promised visit to Jubb's tea-table, we must see how the Pommer incident finished, for it looked like having a very serious termination.

Pommer's waking in the morning, like Towker's, was a waking to repentance, only more of it. His head felt like the head of a nail having an interview with the hammer. Each phrenological organ ached against its fellows as if for a prize, and all seemed to have a fair chance of winning it. There was not room enough in his head for all the ache he had earned, so the rearguard of it slipped

down his back and pitched tents in the unhappy man's lumbar region.

Pommer found himself (this expression is particularly appropriate) lying partially undressed on the top of his counterpane. He lay there a little while endeavouring to recall the events of the previous night, but his success was not equal to his desire. He recollected perfectly well the singing, toasting, and merry-making. In a hazier fashion he recollected having some difference with the printer, Sulky Jim. He had a dim remembrance of a little pugilistic exercise, but was not quite sure which had the worst of it. He knew he had some of it, for blood was on his face and hands, and his nose was swollen and sore. After this events became dim, exceedingly dim. He seemed to have some recollection of hammering at the printer's door, but whether he did so or only dreamed it, and whether Jim came out or declined to come out, either in the flesh or as a vision, he could not determine. After the fight all was vague, horrid, and unsatisfactory.

Pommer, it may be mentioned, lived by himself in a small but cosy cottage. A bachelor,

he kept no servants. As a rule he made himself a cup of tea before he went to business, the rest of his meals he took out. In the afternoon an old lady who did charring used to come in, having a key for the purpose, and put the place straight.

About eleven o'clock on that memorable morning one of his friends of overnight looked in, and found the warlike individual of yesterday trying to appease his indignant brain with a dish of hot tea.

This friend, a Mr. Corner, had a wild look in his eyes and a generally terrified appearance. Had he declared he had passed through a whole panorama of indescribable horrors, people would have believed him.

Without speaking he carefully closed the room door and stood moodily gazing at Pommer; then, heaving a deep sigh, he muttered:

“Poor Pommer! poor, miserable man!”

Mr. Pommer looked at his companion with speechless astonishment.

“What do you mean?” at length he managed to gasp, while his cup in one hand rattled against his saucer in the other like untamed castanets.

“What—do—I—mean?” said Corner, in a broken and disjointed fashion; “what do I mean? Alas! what should I mean? The printer—Batter—Sulky Jim.”

“W—what?” cried Pommer tremblingly.

“Found—murdered—outside his own house—in the ditch opposite.” This was said deliberately, but with pathos, and then Mr. Corner covered his face with his hands.

Pommer dropped his cup and saucer with a crash, and fell back in his chair. Some few seconds elapsed before he could speak, and then he said with a great gasp, “Oh!”

“You must fly,” whispered Pommer’s friend excitedly.

“But I did not do it!” cried Pommer, with passionate anguish. “I did not do it!” And he placed his hands on his knees, and tried to keep from shivering.

Here there was a knock at the door, and presently another friend entered, with finger on lip and a scared face.

“Have you told him?” he hoarsely inquired of Corner, pointing to the unhappy occupant of the house.

“Really, gentlemen,” said poor Pommer,

scarcely knowing what to say, "I hope you do not think me capable of murder." But he could not help noticing that neither of his companions had offered him the hand of friendship.

"This thing is sure," muttered Mr. Corner gloomily, "that twenty people at least heard you threaten to murder the man, and four of us saw you take a knife out and threaten to cut him into—what was it, Mr. Gloster?"

"Scallops," replied Mr. Gloster gravely.

"Did they find the knife, Mr. Gloster?" inquired Corner.

"A knife was found by the body," replied Gloster; "and it was described to me as possessing a curved blade."

Mr. Pommer turned ghastly white, and felt in all his pockets, but could not find his knife.

"I am also informed," continued Gloster, "that the appearance of the body indicated that the murderer had been trying to get the ribs out; I am curious to know if that is consistent with Pommer's threat."

"I believe the bones are removed in the process of scalloping," replied Mr. Corner. "But we are wasting time. Any moment the hue-and-cry may reach here. The bloodhounds of

vengeance once on an unbroken track, all hope must be abandoned. Pommer's only safety is in flight. We" (this was to Pommer), "moved by old associations, are prepared to risk everything to save you."

"But I am innocent!" cried poor Pommer in an agony of grief.

"We hope so," said his two friends. "The thing is, to gain time; so that your innocence may be established without putting you to the disgrace of incarceration in gaol."

Mr. Pommer tried hard to get his thoughts into something like order, but there was no getting up a procession that morning. He remembered, with a shudder, accounts he had read of murderers who even on the scaffold protested that they knew nothing of the crime for which they were to suffer death. True, he had been heard to threaten the man. He had also been seen to draw a knife. Where was that knife now? The knife found by the body had been described as having a curved blade. His knife had a curved blade. The rough endeavour, too, to scallop Sulky Jim, quite an original idea for a murderer, seemed to point him out as the perpetrator of the direful deed. Then there

was blood about him. This might, of course, have come from his nose, which had been damaged in the small battle overnight; but who could say? Scientists, with their delicate tests, might be able to discover evidences of printing ink in some of the gore, and so fix another link in the chain of evidence. Certainly his only safety seemed to be in flight.

“Martin ought to have been here with the disguise by this time,” muttered Gloster, consulting his watch with an impatient air. Proceeding to the door he opened it, and looked up the road. He returned to the room almost immediately in company with Mr. Martin, another of Pommer’s friends, who carried a large carpet-bag in his hand.

Mr. Martin just nodded gloomily at the murderer (Pommer felt sure he was one by this time), but did not trust himself to speak. Instead of wasting time talking, he opened his bag, and displayed its contents, which consisted of some rather peculiar garments.

Half paralysed with fear, Mr. Pommer allowed his friends to dress him as they pleased, and very quickly they finished him off in a style that completely destroyed his identity.

Just before dinner-time a strange-looking being passed up the High Street on his way to the open country. Underneath a long sad-hued ulster, light blue trousers and red stockings were just visible. An enormous pair of shoes of a sort of canoe fashion, finished him that end. Huge red whiskers and a red wig, surmounted by a broad-brimmed low-crowned hat, finished him the other end. Blue goggle glasses concealed his eyes, and yellow gloves several sizes too large, concealed his hands. Under his right arm was a crutch, and in his left hand was a picturesque old gingham umbrella. In order to justify the presence of the crutch, he was compelled to walk both lame and slow.

This was the fashion in which Pommer was dressed by his three friends. Instructions were given him to meet them at "The Last Chance," a small public house standing by itself, about half-a-mile from the town.

The man was disguised effectually enough, of that there was no doubt; but he thought as he went along, that if he fled the country in his present guise, he would have about eleven millions of followers at his heels by

the time he reached the nearest sea-port, judging by the rate at which they were gathering minute by minute.

How he did not bless that crutch may be imagined. As has been noticed, he was compelled to go slow for fear of bringing his stage properties into contempt, and to keep up the appearance of lameness which he had assumed at first. His thoughts grew wickeder as his followers increased. The children first took up his trail, then adults dropped into the procession. Dogs presently took their places, and began to sniff at his gory-looking stockings, and he shuddered as he thought of the possibility of being pursued by blood-hounds. He felt half inclined to take hold of his crutch at the small end, and give it a good swing round and so demolish part of the crowd, but the thought of being arrested held him back.

Just before Pommer arrived at "The White Owl," which it was necessary he should pass, it occurred to him that he had no money in his possession, for with the exception of his underclothing and waistcoat, the garments he was wearing were strange to him.

As the three gentlemen, his dressers, had quitted his house first, he now hoped that he might possibly discover one or more of them in "The White Owl," taking refreshment, and he concluded to make bold entrance there, trusting to his disguise. He could accost either of the three as a stranger, and somehow make known his beggared condition. He also thought it would be a desirable thing to get rid of the mob at his heels, and, to tell the whole truth, it may as well be added, that Pommer's thirst was of a nature almost diabolic, and that a vision of soda and brandy haunted his stricken soul.

On entering the coffee-room, Pommer saw at a glance that Mr. Corner was present, besides several others, some strangers and some well known to Pommer. All eyed him curiously, as indeed they might, for he looked as much like a lineal descendant of the original scarecrow, as it was possible for a man to look.

Mr. Corner treated his friend as an entire stranger; in fact, he took a hasty departure, without giving the unhappy man the slightest chance of opening a conversation. The other

drinkers, too, soon finished their glasses and departed, leaving the broken-hearted murderer alone.

Presently a brilliant idea struck Pommer. Feeling in his waistcoat pocket, he found there his usual pencil-case; a handsome, massive silver one; one that he was very proud of, and always wrote with. It may seem strange that the idea did not strike him that the exhibition of this article was indiscreet, but it did not. Many a man flying from justice in disguise has, by an act of indiscretion, quite as simple, discovered his identity. This pencil-case might be said to be known to every one who knew its owner.

Mr. Pommer now took down an old concert bill from the wall of the room, and rang the bell to summon the waiter, who quickly appeared. Pommer, on the back of the bill, wrote :

“Dumb, but not deaf; what is the name of this town?”

He was informed.

“This hotel?”

“‘The White Owl.’”

“Can I have a bed here?”

“Yes, sir.”

"For a week or two?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you get me a chop and potatoes quickly?"

"In half-an-hour, sir."

"Are there any grounds where I can exercise till the chop is ready?"

"Yes, sir; acre and a half, sir."

"Thanks, I will exercise."

"Thank you, sir."

Artful Pommer, he knew all about the grounds, and knew that he could get out into a quiet lane, and so proceed to "The Last Chance." The soda and brandy must wait, or rather he must.

His position, however, was far from reassuring. An acceleration of speed was prominent among the necessities of the situation. Visions of a perspiring and frantic waiter hastening along the road after him with a chop and "taters," did not add to his peace of mind.

Among all these minor perplexities and agitations, his crime was not forgotten. A picture of the murdered body of Sulky Jim, with his bare ribs sticking out like the

handles of a portmanteau, was constantly in his imagination.

Meanwhile, complications were arriving post haste, and treating "The White Owl" as a terminus. Not content with simply remaining, they commenced to get mixed up, and caused a tangle.

What with walking slowly for a considerable distance, and then sitting in the coffee-room holding converse with the waiter, something like an hour had passed since Pommer had quitted his own house, and, unknown to that gentleman, there was great excitement in the High Street.

Up from the neighbourhood of Pommer's cottage came a group of excited pedestrians, one being a policeman. The group was led by a Mr. Willson, opposite neighbour to Pommer. This concourse of people, mixing with the now dispersing crowd which had been following our hero, soon obtained certain information, and rushed off at once on a burning scent to "The White Owl," still led by Mr. Willson.

Without any ceremony, Willson, followed by his companions, made quick entry into the hotel, and encountered Pommer just as he

was about to proceed from the coffee-room to the grounds.

“Here’s the villain!” cried Willson to the policeman and his friends, as he seized Pommer by the collar of his coat; “here’s the murderer!”

Poor Pommer nearly fell down with fright. All was discovered then, and all was lost!

“Now,” cried Mr. Willson excitedly, “confess—confess at once. What have you done with the body?” and in his excitement he shook Pommer roughly, as if he almost expected to see a gory body roll from out his sleeve or from up his back.

The question was rather puzzling to Pommer. Dark and mysterious, doubtless, but with a hopeful gleam about its edges; since, if the body of Sulky Jim had been spirited away, he (Pommer) could scarcely be put upon trial for murder.

The next action of Willson filled Pommer with even more surprise; for, letting go of the murderer, the excited man suddenly burst into tears, and exclaimed: “Poor old Pommer! basely, foully murdered! And it was only last night that I saw him in this house in the best of health and spirits.”

Mr. Pommer now asked, in an assumed voice :
“Who, pray, am I accused of murdering?”

“Who?” shouted Willson. “Why, my opposite neighbour, Mr. Pommer, a worthy and much respected inhabitant of this place.”

It was the waiter’s turn to be surprised now, for there, sure enough, was the dumb man speaking.

Mr. Pommer was filled so full of astonishment that he absolutely grew heavier. To be accused of two murders in the same day—one of them said to be committed on his own body, which he had afterwards hidden and was now asked to produce—was certainly sufficient to puzzle the man.

While Mr. Willson was deploring the loss of Pommer, the waiter was struck by an idea with such force that he gave an incoherent shout; then he cried hurriedly, as if afraid his evidence would fit in no other place if not given at once: “I don’t know about any murder; but this party, if I don’t make a mistake, has Mr. Pommer’s silver pencil-case in his pocket.”

There was a general shout for Pommer to show the pencil-case, but Pommer simply glared at the crowd through his blue goggles, and

kept silence. He was revolving matters in his mind.

This was Mr. Willson's story, which he was telling to an eager and excited crowd.

"This morning, about eleven o'clock, I saw three men go into Mr. Pommer's cottage—not in a body, but shortly after one another. The morning was a bit misty, and my sight is not very good, so that I could not swear to any one of the three. Some time afterwards, being at my window again, I saw this eccentric-looking person, whom I can swear to, emerge from the back gate of Mr. Pommer's garden, and after he had cautiously looked about, as if to see that no one was watching him, he hobbled up the High Street.

"Knowing that Mr. Pommer lived alone in the house, I felt uneasy, and after some little time had elapsed I ventured across the road and knocked at Mr. Pommer's front door. Mr. Pommer's house is at the corner, you know, and my front commands a view of both the front and the back of his premises. I received no answer after knocking several times, and became more and more alarmed. After this I climbed over his back fence and peeped in

at one of the windows. As far as I could make out the place seemed all in confusion, and I became confirmed in my first idea that robbers had been on the premises. Greatly alarmed, but unwilling to take all the responsibility on my own shoulders, I sought out a neighbour or two, and this policeman. By opening a window with a knife-blade, we managed to get into the house. There we found indisputable evidences of crime in Mr. Pommer's blood-stained coat, trousers, and shirt-front. High and low we searched, but the body is missing, and this fiend I proclaim to be a murderer."

Such was Mr. Willson's story, delivered with much vehemence and not at all destitute of dramatic effect. While he was telling it, and the pencil-case was being demanded, Pommer was up to his ears in cogitation. Two courses were open to him, but neither of them was overcrowded with jubilation. He could throw away his disguise, and, as Pommer, stand his trial for the murder of Sulky Jim; or still preserving his disguise he could elect to stand at the bar to answer the charge of slaying and making away with the body of Mr. Pommer.

He concluded to adopt the first plan, as it would have the effect of giving him his liberty, for a time at all events. Flight might still be possible later on. He held his breath for a moment, and his heart beat quickly ; for he felt that he was about to create a sensation. Then suddenly dashing to the ground hat, wig, whiskers, and spectacles, he extended his arms, and shouted : " Behold the body of Pommer ! "

Mr. Willson's lower jaw fell on to his breast with a thud. The force of the blow was broken by his neckerchief, or damage might have ensued ; while his eyes stuck out, and strained at their anchors till his head ached. He said never a word, but gazed and gazed at Pommer, till that individual, despite the actual seriousness of his situation, absolutely roared with laughter at the petrified mute before him.

Pommer, however, suddenly exchanged his laughter for a shriek of dismay, for in the dark of the doorway behind the excited faces of the crowd there arose a ghastly spectre. There, with dark marks under the glaring eyes, and with horrid locks unkempt, was the ghost of the murdered Jim. Pommer could say no words, but after that one shriek of horror, his face froze

into agony. Terror, thirteen over proof, was present as well.

"Blest if that ain't the old fool who gave me two black eyes last night," cried the ghost suddenly.

At the sound of that voice, Pommer underwent another change. For the moment one might have thought him gone suddenly crazy; but such was not the case. Jim's husky voice was sweeter music to him than a whole Handel Festival with a reserved seat for nothing. Bursting through the crowd, he made for the printer, who, apprehensive of further hostilities, put up his hands to defend himself.

"No, no!" shouted Pommer; "I don't want to fight you. Are you alive, man? Are you alive?"

"Alive! Of course I am," replied the printer, with a half-developed grin on his unwashed face.

"And not murdered?"

"Murdered, no!"

"And not scalloped?"

"Not as I knows of."

Then Pommer saw that he had been shamefully hoaxed by his three friends, but notwith-

standing, his joy was exuberant. He embraced the printer, much to that gentleman's annoyance, then he danced round the room careless of toes, calling aloud for drinks for all.

After telling how he had been deceived, he said :

“And if I commit three more murders to-day, making a total of five, I hope, my friends, to have your forgiveness.”





CHAPTER VI.

In which all concerned get their tea, and Mr. Jubb's dog helps himself to supper.

MR. TOWKER did not feel in an unbecoming state of hilarity when he arose from his slumbers on the Sunday. "Tea with Mrs. Jubb" (shudder) seemed running through his brain like the burden of a melancholy ditty. The power of one unpleasant thought to override all other thoughts is undoubtedly a sign of mental weakness. A man with better nerves and a stronger brain than Mr. Towker in the same situation would have said: "Tea with Mr. Jubb; tea with wife and baby; tea with Tolliger. Hang Mrs. Jubb!" With Towker, however, the one domineering thought was "Tea with Mrs. Jubb." The other occupants of

the table were no more in his view than a set of toast-devouring, tea-drinking phantoms. He and she would be the only solid people sitting glaring at each other, with fear in his heart and hatred in hers.

There was no help for it, however; downstairs he must go, but he made up his mind to keep as far away from Mr. Jubb, and as near to Tolliger as possible.

Five o'clock found the company sitting round the table.

Tolliger was in capital spirits and full of Mr. Pommer's adventure of yesterday, a full account of which he had gathered overnight at "The White Owl," and which he now gave to the Jubbs' tea-party amid general laughter.

Presently Mrs. Jubb said, addressing her husband:

"I suppose that was where you spent Friday evening, at this precious "White Owl."

"Yes," answered Jubb, with a laugh; "before the murder, of course."

Mrs. Jubb, apparently not liking the jocular manner of her husband, answered with a snort:

"A nice lot of tipplers you are, when you are there, I suppose."

"No," replied Jubb; "we have a glass or two; there are some, of course, who would possibly be better with less, but the generality are certainly temperate men, who meet for a friendly chat in the evening. Friday was an exceptional night, Pommer was celebrating his birthday, and we were all pretty merry."

"You were not there, I suppose, Mr. Towker," said Mrs. Jubb.

"Of course he was," cried Jubb. "Didn't I tell you all about the meeting?"

"Dear me, I'd quite forgotten," replied Mrs. Jubb. Then, as she noticed the inquiring look Mrs. Towker gave her James, she hastened on to make a point, before Towker had an opportunity of speaking. "Mr. Jubb did tell me, of course, as I suppose Mr. Towker told you," turning to Isabel; "and quite right too, for I think it very despicable of a man to go into such haunts and places, that he dare not mention to his wife where he has been spending his time." Mrs. Jubb having made her point, turned to Towker with a plate of cake, and said in her sweetest manner: "You are not getting on, Mr. Towker."

Mr. Towker bowed, and taking a slice of

cake, felt that he was getting on, but not in the way he should like to. He certainly had not mentioned the birthday-party, because his wife never seemed curious as to where his evenings were spent. Now he felt that he had given Mrs. Jubb an opportunity of endeavouring to sow suspicion in the bosom of his wife. He felt, however, that he was being punished for the surreptitious birthday-party, by this apparently open and above board tea-party. He said nothing, however, but filled his mouth with cake, hoping that the muscular movements of his face would hide any expression of chagrin from the lynx-eyed Ethel.

Isabel, who was inclined to take her Towker's part, thought it best to say nothing, after the severe reflections on reticent husbands uttered by Mrs. Jubb.

When the tea was finished, and the tea-things cleared away, conversation turned upon practical joking, starting of course from the hoax perpetrated upon Pommer.

"I tell you this," said Tolliger, "to put you on your guard, Mr. Towker. 'The White Owl,' and in fact all this neighbourhood, is

a right down hot-bed of practical joking. Pommer can't say much about his hoax, for he has been in as many affairs as any one. Why, it was all through a practical joke played upon me, that I left my last lodgings."

"Oh, do tell us," said Mrs. Jubb.

"I did not mind the joke so very much," continued Tolliger; "but when my landlord wanted me to pay for the damage done, I gave him a week's notice and left. I was rather sorry to leave him, for we got on very well together; but I hate to live in a house where I am not on good terms with every one, and the affair I am about to relate caused a certain amount of ill-feeling."

"I should think there could be nothing more uncomfortable," said Mrs. Jubb, "than living in a house where one is not on the best of terms with all the inhabitants. What is your opinion, Mr. Towker?"

Towker felt the stab, and would have liked to go out and groan for five minutes, but feeling that such a relief was not to be got, simply agreed with Mrs. Jubb.

"My landlord," said Tolliger, "bought one day at a sale an ancient-looking bust of Nero,

mounted on a short pedestal. This bust he thought would be an ornament to his back garden; but at supper-time a thought struck him, and he proceeded to act upon it. The details I picked up from the servant afterwards. The street-door opened into a small hall; this opened into a small parlour. This parlour, if I entered by the front entrance, I had to pass through on my way to my apartments upstairs. Into this small parlour he brought the bust, and placed it by the side of the table. A rough coat was then thrown over its shoulders, a red scarf wound round its neck, and a battered old hat placed on its head. The arms of the coat were then stuffed and brought to rest on the table, stuffed gloves were put into the ends of the sleeves and looked like gloved hands. In the right hand a pistol was placed, resting on the table and pointing to the door at which I should enter. A short pipe was placed in between the fingers of the other hand, and a bottle and glass were placed on the table before the figure. My landlord and his troupe then retired to rest, knowing how uncertain I was in my time of coming home. It was about one o'clock in the morning when I

opened the street-door and gently closed it behind me. As a rule, there was just a little glimmer of gas left burning in this little room to enable me to see; but on this particular occasion my landlord had left a good light so as to give me a fair shock when I opened the door. This door had been left about an inch ajar, and the unusual brilliance of the illumination aroused my suspicions. I am, as you know, not a drinking man, but I had had sufficient to give me a supply of what is commonly called 'Dutch courage.' Nevertheless, when I peeped through the key-hole my heart went bumpity bump, for there, with a deadly weapon, sat a desperate burglar, evidently waiting to slay me before he commenced moving all the valuables! A horrible suspicion filled my mind, and I shuddered as I feared the villain had already murdered the rest of the household. I tell you truly I panted then for vengeance.

"There was a side entrance to the house, but I usually entered at the front. My key, however, fitted both doors, and providing the chain was not up and the bolts were not shot, I could get into the house that

way. This was now my hope. Just behind the burglar was another door, and if I attacked him at all it must be in the rear.

“I opened the street-door gently and found myself in the street. There was no sign of a policeman or any other individual, so I tried the side-door which opened readily, and let me into the house. Creeping to a cupboard in the dark where many odd things were kept, I felt about for a weapon, and presently to my great joy laid my hand upon a coal-hammer. This had a head that weighed some two pounds, with a sharp point to it, and I flattered myself that things began to look eclipsy for the burglar.

“Silently, and in the dark, I felt my way to the door behind the robber with my left hand; the trusty coal-hammer being in my right, I flung open the door. Squash! crack! down on his head came the hammer, and over went the burglar. The pistol dropped from his dead hand, but I was too excited to notice that, I flung myself on my prostrate foe with the intention of getting him by the throat, and then — well — then I looked at him, and saw how I had been fooled. I

felt so disgusted that I hit old Nero fair and square between the eyes, and knocked his nose into the back of his neck. My landlord did not enjoy the joke so much when he found he had a broken chair and a broken fender to replace, in addition to an utterly disfigured bust. As I said, he wanted me to share the expenses with him, which I declined to do, and eventually left."

At the conclusion of Tolliger's story, the little Towker suddenly woke up and began to cry. This caused a diversion, especially to the two ladies, so Jubb proposed to the gentlemen that they should have a pipe in the summer-house, which they accordingly did, although Towker could scarcely repress a shudder as he took his seat, remembering the hour of torture he had gone through on a previous occasion. Jubb's dog joined them in the summer-house. This was a collie, recently introduced by Jubb for the companionship of his wife, and the protection of his property.

This dog Prince added another terror to Towker, for in his mind it seemed to him that Mrs. Jubb had enlisted the dog as her friend

and his foe. He even went so far as to think sometimes his imagination was so distorted by his painful position, that Mrs. Jubb had taken this dog into her confidence, and informed him of their respective positions. The dog was frequently about the house, and Towker always thought it regarded him with a sinister expression. Although it had committed no act of pronounced hostility, it always repelled Towker's advances, and refused to allow him to stroke or fondle it. Towker thought this boded no good, for he seemed to be the only one in the house on indifferent terms with Prince. Jubb could romp with it, and so could Tolliger. It was friendly with Mrs. Towker, and would allow the baby to be placed on its back. Towker offered Prince a piece of biscuit once, hoping to effect a better feeling between them; but Mrs. Jubb came on the scene, and asked him if he was trying to poison her pet, so no attempt at bribery was made afterwards.

Jubb opened Prince's mouth, to show the others what an excellent set of teeth he had, and after about an hour's smoking Tolliger said he was going out for the evening. Towker and his wife and baby retired to their own

apartments for a time, to put baby to bed, promising to come down to have a bit of supper at nine ; but that supper did not come to pass.

Prince, it appears, followed Jubb indoors, and Mrs. Jubb made much of the animal, while Jubb sat admiring the pair ; for Jubb was very fond of his wife, and liked to see her looking well-pleased.

Presently Jubb said : "Don't be alarmed, my dear, I'm going to pretend to strike you ; to ascertain how far Prince will be moved. He seems very much attached to you." He then rose suddenly, and made a pretended blow at his wife. Prince pricked up his ears, and uttered an ominous growl. Jubb was quite satisfied, and was on the point of sitting down, when he thought he should like to steal a kiss from the rosy lips of his smiling partner. Without thinking anything more about the dog, he tried to fling his arms round the neck of his wife. In the little romp that ensued, over went Mrs. Jubb's chair with that good lady in it. She uttered a scream, and Jubb, in trying to save her, lost his balance, and tumbled down beside her.

Mrs. Jubb's cry of alarm was nothing how-

ever, compared to the yell that Jubb gave utterance to the next moment, for Prince, after tearing off enough of his master's coat-tails to clear decks for action, took him with that famous set of teeth just above the calf, and commenced to pull him out of the crowd, with the apparent intention of carrying him into the back garden in the same fashion as he would a bone, and burying him under the lilac bushes till such time as he felt he could enjoy him.

"Let go, you brute," roared Jubb, as he struggled to his feet; but the brute did not seem inclined to let go. It was the first time he had tasted Jubb, and probably he thought the flavour superior to his usual biscuits. At all events, he kept hold, and Mr. Jubb could imagine his vital fluid flowing into the body of his faithful dog at the rate of about a gill a minute.

Mr. Jubb kicked with the leg that had no four-legged mortgage on it, but could not get rid of Prince, and, feeling that there was less of him and more of the dog every second, he hesitated not to deal so severely with the animal that it left go of him and sought the garden. The whole affair lasted only a few

seconds, so that by the time Towker, he having heard Jubb's yell, appeared on the scene, all the fighting and biting were over.

Mrs. Jubb was half-fainting ; so she was left in the care of Mrs. Towker, while Jubb and his lodger walked off to the nearest doctor's to have his bitten leg attended to.

This little affair quite spoiled the supper arrangement, and it added to Towker's comfort in another way ; for the next day Jubb sold his dog, and vowed he'd never keep another.





CHAPTER VII.

Mr. Towker's head having had a short interview with a turnip, an explanation is appended.

MR. TOWKER, warned by his friend Tolliger concerning the tendency to practical joking that existed in the neighbourhood, determined to keep aloof from such practices. Notwithstanding his determination however, fate managed to dovetail him into the end of one of the schemes, which, without his involuntary assistance, would not have had such a complete and scientific a finish as it was afterwards enabled to boast of.

He had occasion to remain in London late, and went home by the last train, which put him down at his station about half-past twelve o'clock, midnight.

Hurrying along home, he presently met three or four of "The White Owl" customers.

Halting for a moment to shake hands, one of them said :

"We've been delayed nearly half an hour down at Pownall's, the greengrocer's. There's evidently something wrong there. About half his shutters are up, and one of his windows is broken. We can make nobody hear. The shop door is closed. If Pownall was a drinking man I should think he'd had too much, but he's a very careful fellow that way ; you'll have to pass the shop, you'll notice."

Towker went on thinking of what he had heard. He knew Pownall very well ; in fact he dealt with him. Pownall was noted for one thing—his pride in his shop shutters. There were ten of them, all well made, handsomely grained and varnished, and Pownall used to say they were the best shutters in the parish. They fitted their frame to such a nicety too, and were possessed of such righteous instincts that not one of them would go into any place but the place designed for it by their maker. These shutters stood in a sort of sentry-box down the side street during the day, and were numbered

from 1 to 10, the numbers being boldly chalked on their backs, so that there should be no difficulty in putting them up correctly, if, by any mischance, they got mixed.

Towker, on arriving at Pownall's shop, halted for a moment, and found the statement he had recently listened to quite correct. About half the shutters were up, and one window was broken. He hardly liked to interfere, and yet he hardly liked to pass without ascertaining if all was right inside.

Concluding he could do no harm by inquiring if any one was inside, he advanced to the broken window and cried :

“Is any one here?”

He was very much discomfited at finding a large-sized turnip flung at his head, followed by a loud shout of “Ha, ha, ha! I've got you this time!”

Luckily for Towker the full force of the blow fell on his hat, which went flying into the road.

Towker picked that article up, and leaving further inquiries for a future time, fled home. That Pownall flung the turnip at his head Towker felt quite sure, having recognised his voice when he spoke. The riddle was not who

threw the turnip, but it was this : Why should a respectable greengrocer sit behind a broken window at nearly one o'clock in the morning to pelt passers-by with turnips ? A satisfactory explanation shall be given.

Mr. Pownall, on this particular evening, had been to a party. The party was given in honour of the silver wedding of an old friend. Mrs. Pownall did not go because she had to mind the shop. Pownall promised to be home by eleven or before, and told his wife to leave the putting up of his favourite shutters to him, and to make herself cosy in the arm-chair in the parlour after closing the shop-door about the usual shutting-up time—nine o'clock.

There is no need to go into any details of the joviality which reigned supreme at the silver wedding. When a matter of twenty people, some old, some young, some married, some unmarried, of both sexes, gather together and the banquet is spread, and the wine-cup and punch-bowl go round, and music and mirth abound, the joviality is understood.

Mr. Pownall, who greatly enjoyed his evening's entertainment, kept his promise to his wife, and despite the pressing invitations to stay a

little longer, arrived at his own house as the clocks were striking eleven.

It is a difficult matter to state to a nicety Pownall's exact condition. The clearest way to put it is this: He had had sufficient to drink, perhaps more than sufficient, he could walk erect and steadily, and his head was tolerably clear. So long as everything went smoothly and in correct order, the man was right; but there was a slight dulness about his reasoning faculties that would probably place him in difficulties if he encountered anything a little out of its regular order.

On Mr. Pownall's arrival home, his wife proceeded at once upstairs to bed. She had been fast asleep in the arm-chair, as she admitted, for the last two hours, and the worthy greengrocer at once set to work to put up his shutters for the night. He had taken off his coat and now stood out in the moonlight, ruddy-faced, strong-limbed, white-waistcoated, like the jolly and prosperous British tradesman he was.

Opening the sentry-box with the usual key, he drew forth the first of his admirable shutters. This of course was always placed last in the

box, so as to come out first. No. 1 went up into its place with a healthy sound, between a click and a bang, and Pownall smiled as he said :

“That’s all right, I was half afraid of the job, considering what I’ve had to-night, but I shall soon be through, and then to bed. That was stunning whisky, though.”

It is a question whether Mr. Pownall would have smiled so sweetly, or have felt quite so happy, if he had noticed standing in the deep shadow, some forty yards off on the opposite side of the way, four or five dusky figures. There was a good deal of whispering and incipient chuckling going on among them, but they were well in the shadow, so that Pownall was quite ignorant of their presence.

These were some of “The White Owl” gentry, and always open to a bit of a joke, if occasion offered. They were not above looking up occasion if occasion was a slow goer, so that there was generally a joke in full sail, or one on the stocks. Pownall knew all about these merry gentlemen perfectly well, and often joined in the laugh at their pranks. On one or two occasions, it must be confessed,

he had been in the thick of the joke. That was where he was now, although unaware of the fact. To tell the truth, he had not arrived at the thickest part yet, but he was on the road to it.

No. 2 shutter went up into its place cheerily enough, and so did No. 3, but on attempting to get No. 4 home, he encountered a chilling frost. It would not fit in at all for some time; then he got it fixed fast, but in a wrong position. For some time it refused to come down, but at last consented with such alacrity, that Mr. Pownall, who was using all his strength, besides all the strength of the whisky he had taken, sat down suddenly on the pavement, and then assumed a prostrate position, with the shutter on top of him. If he had not been fully occupied with his own thoughts, and distracted by the clatter of the falling shutter, he must have heard the tremendous chuckling and slapping of knees on the other side of the road, but as these sounds were quickly suppressed by the authors of them, he heard them not.

First he picked himself up, and rubbed his head and other parts of his anatomy in a serious

fashion. Then picking up the shutter, he supported it with one hand, and regarded it steadfastly for a few brief moments. Silver weddings had been quite knocked out of his head by a wooden shutter, and he certainly now began to experience the effects of that stunning whisky.

In moody silence the worthy greengrocer made another attempt to get the refractory shutter into its place, but met with no success; in fact, he narrowly escaped smashing his toes with it once or twice. Then he turned it upside down, and to his great surprise and joy, it fitted into its place, and he concluded at once that in putting it away in the morning or taking it out at night he had by accident turned it upside down.

He was very careful in taking the next one out not to reverse it, and was quite delighted to find that it went into its place beautifully.

"1, 2, 3, 4, 5," said Pownall, with a chuckle; "why, the job is half done." But, alas! No. 6 proved anything but a parent's blessing. It declined to go into its place either end up, and after about ten minutes' vain struggle with it he left it leaning against his window, while he went and sat on his doorstep to reflect.

A sudden thought brought him to his feet, and turning the shutter round to ascertain if it had the figure "6" on it, he dropped his chin on to his breast and muttered:

"Drunk to a dead certainty, or else my eyes are all wrong."

Pownall might well stare, for in place of the figure there was a mass of scratches and crosses in chalk. The man winked and blinked and rubbed his eyes and looked again and again, but no sign of the "6" could he see.

Suddenly a new thought struck him, and he, hastening to his sentry-box, drew forth the next shutter. This should bear the figure "7" on its back, but it bore no mark whatever.

All was clear now to Pownall. Some scoundrel or scoundrels had managed by some means to obtain entrance to his sentry-box, and had been having quite a festival among his shutters. Some of the numbers were rubbed out, some were scratched all over, none of the figures were discernible. It seemed little less than a miracle to Pownall that he had succeeded in placing so many of his shutters as he had; but he felt a cold chill run down his back

as he reflected that possibly, although they were up, they were not in their right places, and that when he came to the end of his task, if ever he got there, he might possibly find half a shutter over. Pownall groaned as he pictured himself taking down and putting up shutters all through the weary hours of the night.

While the sorrowful greengrocer was thinking and groaning and heaping blessings on the author of the mischief, there was a movement among the crew of dusky shadows opposite. One by one they crept silently away like deep-dyed conspirators as they were. They had no intention of missing the fun, however.

In about three or four minutes one of them popped round Pownall's corner in a hurried fashion, carelessly whistling, but seemingly making haste home to bed.

"Hallo, old fellow!" said he to Pownall, as that worthy looked up from his seat on his doorstep. "What on earth's the matter? Oh, I see. Been out dining late, naughty man! keeping quality hours, and now can't bring his mind back to business. I thought I was about the last man out—been to the

theatre. You had better have been there, and kept away from the cup that cheers but oft inebriates."

"You go to Jericho!" said Pownall gloomily. "Some consummate idiot has been playing larks with my shutters, and mixed them all up; and now hang me if I can get them into their places."

"Don't you number them?" inquired his friend.

"Number them? Of course I do; but the villain has either rubbed or scratched the numbers out. I should like to get hold of him; if I didn't give him a condensed ten minutes my name's not Pownall."

At this moment another hurrying whistling person came along.

"Hallo!" cried he, shaking hands first with Mr. Pownall's companion, and then with the dejected greengrocer; "what's wrong — wife turned you out? Shop not shut up either; that looks bad. Not intoxicated, I hope?"

This new-comer, having been informed of the state of affairs, was moved to much indignation.

"Not that any of us mind a joke, but this is going too far."

Here some tuneful voices were heard on the air singing, in a variety of keys, "God save the Queen;" and presently three friends arm-in-arm came up the road. Of course there was a stoppage, and much sympathy was expressed.

"If we had not been at the concert," said one, "we might have come across the wretch at work."

"Ah," chimed in the others, "and if we had——"

And there they stopped, feeling that words could not tell how they would have served the miscreant.

"Why shouldn't we give Mr. Pownall a hand?" said one presently, as if smitten with a noble and patriotic thought. This was agreed to, and the five of them set to work to shut up Mr. Pownall's shop; that worthy, who singularly enough had not as yet "smelt a rat," assisting also.

It may seem incredible, but nevertheless it is a fact, that though these six men tried hard

they could get no shutter to fit in No. 6's place correctly. If one felt satisfied that he had succeeded, another would immediately declare it to be a misfit, and have it down again.

At length Pownall, who was very cold and literally tired out, took hold of a shutter and tried to fit it in the frame. It seemed all right, except just at one corner, and in a hearty rage he stepped back and took a little run at it, to try and coax it in with a kick. He missed the obstinate corner, however, and his foot and about half his leg went through the window.

He was immediately dragged forth and examined, to see if he had sustained any injury. Providentially he had not, but he was right down tired of the job, so with a frown and a muttered "Hang the shutters!" he put the five back in their box, locked the door, and saying good-night, moodily stalked into his house and closed the shop-door behind him. In the shop-parlour he dropped into his arm-chair in a very bad temper.

In a few moments he heard a squeaky voice at the broken window: "Oh, if yer please, sir,

here's yer shop all open, sir, and yer vinder broken, sir, all to bits, sir."

"All right!" shouted Pownall without troubling himself to rise. "I know."

Very shortly afterwards there came a gruff voice at the window: "I say, guv'nor, if you're at home, there's summat wrong. Dunno if it's a burglary; here's only half yer shutters up, and a pane of glass busted."

"All right! I know," cried Pownall, wondering how there came to be so many people about at that time of night.

"Well, don't be cross," said the voice, and the sound of receding footsteps told that its owner was going away.

After one or two other attacks of this sort Pownall began to be suspicious, and placing himself in a dark corner of his shop, watched to see his next visitor. In him he saw one of the five who had been assisting him to shut up, and now the whole truth dawned on him that these were the miscreants who had tampered with his shutters, and he determined on vengeance.

He selected a turnip, and there was a wild delight in his eye as he felt its weight; then

he hid behind a basket, close to the broken window, to let go at his next tormentor, and very nearly knocked the head off James Towker.





CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Mumley and his little bit of sport with Mr. Jurdon
Mr. Mumley also makes a promise.

MR. TOWKER said nothing to his wife about his adventure with Pownall's turnip, but he related it to Tolliger, who in the course of a few hours brought him a full and true account of the whole affair.

Towker then felt it his duty to call on Pownall, and assure that worthy that he had nothing to do with the plot against his shutters, and to explain how he came to be on the spot.

Pownall expressed his belief in Towker's statement, and begged his forgiveness for nearly knocking his head off. This was granted, and then Pownall said: "I was very vexed,

but I've got over it now, although I shall not neglect an opportunity to get even with my tormentors if I have a chance. I know who they are. I believe that Mumley was at the bottom of it. He's never seen in any of these jokes, but I know he's a rare fellow to set the ball rolling, and he knew I should be out the whole of the evening, because I told him so."

This Mr. Benjamin Mumley was a trades-of good standing. He was generally to be found at "The White Owl," and Towker had on several occasions had a chat with him. He was a man fond of his glass. Whisky was his favourite drink, and he certainly could not be accused of slighting it.

Whisky, with some men, is provocative of thirst, but it was one of Mumley's boasts that it never made him thirsty. In fact he was wont to declare that he never knew what thirst was. Common report said that he never went long enough between his drinks to give thirst the ghost of a chance.

It may be thought that it is scandalising Mr. Mumley to declare him such a lover of whisky. Such, however, is not the case.

Mumley always declared himself fond of the spirit named, so that the declaration of the fact by another person is not scandal, but a friendly endorsement of Mumley's statement, and goes part of the way to prove that Mr. Mumley was a man of truth, and therefore entitled to a little corner in every good man's respect.

No thoughtful man can commend or defend immoderate drinking, but it is an open question as to whether a man who drinks pretty freely, and always wears a truthful tongue is not of more value to society than an habitual liar who shall follow the paths of Temperance till he is filled with tadpoles.

Mr. Mumley considered himself greatly scandalised on one occasion, and right bitterly did he complain of the false rumour. It was the only time he was ever seen to shed tears. One of his facetious friends then and there offered to lay a wager if Mumley would only shed tears enough, to make a snap-dragon with them.

Here is the false report :

Some infamous person or persons spread the report that Mr. Mumley had signed the pledge, and become a teetotaller.

Benjamin was worth seeing and hearing then, although not naturally cut out for an actor or orator. True it is, that only by stirring our feelings to their deepest depths can we hope to develop all there is in us for good or bad. Look what fright and terror can do. We all remember the case of the man who was bed-ridden for some twenty years, when his house took fire and there was no one by to help him. Did he stay there to be -cooked? No; he escaped raw. Gathering a blanket about him, he leaped from his bed, flew down the stairs, and so escaped into the street, and was the champion leap-frog player ever afterwards.

Then there was the case of the man and the bull. The man had been hobbling on crutches for years, was so used to them that he went to bed in them, was afraid, in fact, of letting go of them for fear of catching cold. This man was travelling, well—call it travelling, at the rate of about a mile in seven weeks, when he saw the bull coming. It was the most insane packet of beef ever on exhibition. It seemed a huge, horrible, roaring, tearing mass of hoofs, hair, dust, steam, and eyes, with horns all over it. According to the picture and the account, the

man dropped his crutches, leaped a good fence, and then ran across a wide field. Terror in these two cases developed hitherto unsuspected gymnastic accomplishments; so in Mumley's case wrath developed hitherto unseen and unsuspected depths of feeling. The volcanic deeps of a great soul were stirred, and the auditors stood amazed.

"Me a teetotaller!" gasped Mumley, flinging his clenched fist skyward. "Me!" hitting his right breast with his left hand. "I!" hitting his left breast with his right hand. "This man!" hitting his chest with both sets of knuckles as if anxious to get whoever was inside to come out and fight, "a teetotaller, a pal of the pump, a waterworks robber, a cistern for seltzer, soda water, and other liquefied and diabolical explosives! Imagine, gentlemen, if you can, such an outrageous and awful thing coming to pass! What a stupendous liar the fellow must be who started the rumour! Oh, if I only had him here!"

The friends of the libelled Benjamin agreed that the inventor of the false report must be a monstrous fabricator, a very genius at fiction; and this somewhat mollified the indignant victim.

They solemnly agreed, too, that it was a shameful, hateful, and abominable thing to circulate such a discreditable report; and still further consoled Mumley, by assuring him of their united and undying faith in his spirituous integrity; appending as a sort of rider their firm conviction that no sane person, having a knowledge of Mumley's life and habits, would for one moment believe the report concerning him.

Mr. Mumley's closest friend and boon companion was Joshua Jurdon, who has been already presented to the reader as a builder and undertaker. Mumley was the proprietor of a sort of general store, and both men had excellent businesses.

Mr. Jurdon, however, was not so deep a drinker as his friend Mumley, for two excellent reasons. He had less spare time and less spare money. These are two very good reasons, and quite sufficient. Time, or leisure here means opportunity, and if for every wrong or folly in the egg opportunity served for hatching, the world would be a wickeder place than it is. Whether this non-arrival of opportunity will be allowed to stand to our

credit, it is hard to say; but that it helps to make us more virtuous or less vicious, no man need doubt. Then to look for a moment at the other reason given above, and it is worth looking at: What a number of virtues poverty is responsible for! This may appear startling for the moment, but it is perfectly sound doctrine, and will bear any weight any person likes to place upon it. It will not break down, crack, or give way. Many a man who is good is so because he is poor.

Mumley and Jurdon were both excessively fond of what they termed sport. The implements used were coins of the realm, and were twirled in the air to decide many ventures. The friends usually gambled for drinks or cigars, but were not bound by any promise, understanding, or obligation, to confine their sport to such ephemeral trifles. Dinners, tickets for the theatre, and cab and omnibus fares, had occasionally been settled by the merry little coins. They had also gambled to decide who should pay for two shaves at the barber's, and on one occasion the coins decided that Mumley should give two penny pieces to a tramp, who said he had seen better

days, and looked as if he certainly could not have seen any worse ones. One of their most reckless and desperate bits of gambling, however, up to the time of our story, had been for two new hats. This hat business was rather a serious affair to be decided by the gyrations of a penny-piece, since it involved an outlay of two guineas on the part of one of the gamblers.

That must have been a proud penny-piece if it had knowledge of its doings; quite a good look-out for Radicalism—two bloated aristocrats at the mercy of one of the low-born. Mumley was the loser on this occasion, and he was observed many a time and oft to bestow on his two-guinea hat a look of disgust. It is not always the thing which costs the most that gives us the greatest satisfaction. Jurdon's hat cost him nothing, yet it gave him infinite satisfaction.

I relate this much concerning Benjamin and Joshua in order to prepare the reader's mind for what is coming. A writer, by carefully feeling his way, can make a liberal-minded reader believe almost anything. There may be a fact that the writer thinks it desirable to relate,

but if it is a Portland cement sort of fact, ugly to view, it is not advisable to fling it brutally at the head of a long-suffering reader without notice.

This hat business had happened about a year ago, but the bit of sport now to be related was of quite recent occurrence. It happened just before Towker made his first appearance at "The White Owl," and Towker had gathered the particulars from Tolliger.

On that particular evening both Mumley and Jurdon were in the condition defined by a mutual friend as "middling overcome," and having reached that blissful point they decided to drink no more on that occasion.

Each man had several cigars in his pockets and one between his lips, and yet their desire for sport was not dead.

"I should like to toss up for something," said Mr. Mumley thoughtfully; "but I don't want any more drink. How about two more hats, Josh? You owe me my revenge, there."

"I know I do; but as I bought a hat only last week, you will have to wait for a bit. Can't you think of something else—something we both want?"

“I can,” said rather a grim-looking individual with a broken nose. “From the way you go on, I should say you will soon require a coffin each. I beg to suggest that you toss up for a couple of those very useful articles.”

Mr. Jurdon approved of this suggestion immensely, for owing to healthy weather his undertaking business was a bit dull, and he had both time and timber on his hands.

Mumley rather objected to the idea as too ghastly, but being urged on by the company and encouraged by Jurdon’s favourable terms, he finally consented, and the sport commenced.

In a very few seconds Mumley was hailed as winner, and Jurdon asked him when he should send the box home.

“Not yet,” replied Mumley; “I’ll let you know when.” And soon afterwards the company separated.

The very next evening Mumley, possibly exhilarated by his victory over Jurdon, announced to the assembled company—all of them being friends and neighbours—that there was a treat in store for them.

“I have at home,” said he, “a two-gallon bottle of Irish whisky, guaranteed ten years old.

This day fortnight I intend you all to come round in the evening, and we will draw the cork and taste the cratur."

A light of great joy gleamed in the eyes of the hearers. They felt there was something to live for—for another fortnight, at all events. Had a pessimist, either of the temperamental or scientific brand, started his doleful doctrines on that occasion that little company would have laughed him to scorn.

"Let us join hands," said Jurdon in a voice that quivered with emotion. "Let us join hands and swear to stand by our friend Benjamin on the great occasion."

"It would ill become us," said another member of the company, a short gentleman with a fat nose, which shook and waved three bristles of different colours when he got excited. "It would ill become us to stand aloof and leave our old friend to face that whisky alone. We must be there to stand by him, and if needs be"—here he bestowed a three-volume wink on his compatriots—"to fall with him!"

"Gentlemen!" cried a philosophical-looking member. "Ten years old, think of that! Since that whisky was left to its dreams, wars have

begun and finished; Parliaments have been kicked out; education advanced enormously; house rents ditto; facilities for travel increased; illuminating agents have—Ow!”

This “Ow!” was caused by the sudden descent of the orator’s hat over his eyes. This is a more effective way of settling a speech than the *clôture*. If the House of Commons could introduce a few discriminating bonneters, much time and trouble would be saved.

The little company at “The White Owl” now raised their glasses, clinked them together, and nodded at each other. Then they said, solemnly: “We will be there, we will be there!” But, alas! for all weak human arrangements, they were not there.

Within a week of the meeting now under consideration, Mr. Mumley’s liver intimated its intention of going on strike if he (Mr. Mumley) did not depose his reigning monarch, excess, and place moderation on the vacant throne.

Benjamin, having consulted his medical adviser, the doctor being a bit of a sporting gentleman offered to back Mumley’s liver to beat Mumley at the generous price of ten to

one, if Mumley would not consent to adopt the aforesaid liver's advice.

Thereupon, Benjamin succumbed and took his libations from the doctor instead of the publican.

Sorrow consequently reigned among those who had heard of the ten-year-old whisky, for though Mumley was able at times to get about, he made no further allusion to the subject.

Of course his friends sympathised deeply with the invalid.

"Poor old Mumley!" cried one. "Such a jolly fellow as he always is!"

"Yes," said another, "so open, so honest."

"Ah," murmured a third, as he puffed thoughtfully at his cigar, "say what you will, there are many worse men than Mumley about."

"And to think," said Jurdon musingly, "that we were going round to-morrow night to liberate that magnificent liquor—that ten-year-old whisky!"

"True," said one of the previous speakers. "What rare stuff it must be!"

"I've never," remarked the individual who had spoken so pathetically of Mumley's virtues,

“I’ve never left off thinking about it. Ten years old, guaranteed; it must, indeed, be bonnie!”

“Poor old Mumley!” they all murmured in chorus; and then there followed a fainter ripple of a murmur: “Ten years old!”





CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Mumley failing to keep his promise, strategy is resorted to, and succeeds.

THERE was a gleam of satisfaction in Towker's eye as one morning at breakfast Isabel told him that Mr. Jubb was going to the seaside to spend his holidays.

"And Mrs. Jubb, is she going?" inquired James; and his voice trembled as he asked, for surely, in the absence of the Jubbs, flight would be possible.

"I do not know," replied his wife; "Mr. Jubb wants her to, but at present she says she does not feel inclined to go away."

"Ah," said Towker, and said no more, for such a stroke of good luck seemed impossible.

Nevertheless, he made it his duty to visit an estate right the other side of London, about sixteen miles from the Jubbs, and ascertain all about the houses and rents, and likelihood of getting housed at a day's notice.

One evening, dropping in at "The White Owl," he found the company in a state of great excitement. Jurdon had just finished reading the following letter :

"DEAR JURDON,

"My medical adviser strongly recommends me to drink no whisky for a long time to come. He is of opinion that it aggravates my disorder. I have now been confined to my bed for a week, and as I do not want my disorder to be aggravated, I think I had better follow the doctor's advice. Under these circumstances the two gallons of whisky, I think, had better remain corked till Christmas. It will then be ten-and-a-half years old, and consequently better than it now is.

"Kindly remember me to all the others, and let them know of this arrangement.

"Yours faithfully,

"BENJAMIN MUMLEY."

For studies of disappointment and disgust, the faces of the company would have afforded excellent material to an artist.

One man said: "Old Mumley is so fearfully stingy, that I believe he's only shamming illness to save his whisky."

Another said: "For my part, knowing what a romancer Mumley is, I think the whole affair is a fraud. I believe he has no ten-year-old whisky on his premises."

A third observed: "A promise is a promise, and Mumley or no Mumley, the whisky must be got at somehow."

Oh, the insecurity of friendship! These very men were crying Mumley up to the skies a short time ago, and now they were naming him with bitterness on their tongues. What magical virtue there must be in ten-year-old whisky, when the mere thought of getting a measure of it makes a man's heart glow with kindly feelings, profound charity, and human love; and the mere thought of having to go without it causes the bile to overflow, and the soul to bubble with black and unkindly feelings.

It was extremely fortunate for Mumley that

the whisky was not twenty years old. Had it attained that age, I believe, on the reading of that heart-breaking epistle, the assembled company of toppers would have gone round in a body and cut Mumley's throat.

As it was, a long consultation took place, which resulted in a fierce resolution to have that beautiful whisky, or perish in the attempt. There was, of course, a difficulty in the way, and that was how to obtain possession of the coveted treasure.

"By fair means, by fraud, or by force!" cried Jurdon excitedly, "it must be ours!"

"We swear!" muttered the company with such melodramatic depth, that the beer barrels trembled in the cellar.

Jurdon continued: "It is necessary for Mumley's own sake that we obtain possession of it. On his own confession in his own writing, whisky is a perilous thing for him to have in the house! (Cries of "It is. It is. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!") Is there one man present who can bring his mind to believe that those two gallons of whisky will remain in Mumley's house untouched till Christmas? (Cries of "No, no!") We know his weakness!

(Cries of "We do!") We know its strength!" "Ten years old," murmured the audience, and strong men sighed. Jurdon continued: "We must save him from his whisky!" ("Hear, hear!") "And we must save his whisky from him!" ("Hear, hear!")

"As to the morality of the act," Jurdon continued, "that we will discuss over the nectar. It is sometimes necessary to incur the displeasure of one individual, by doing him a slight injury, in the interests of the community at large. Listen: many years ago I lived in lodgings in a narrow street. I was young; I was poor. My one room looked into the street. A man came and took a room immediately opposite mine. He was in a band, and, being the biggest member in the band, they gave him the biggest instrument. I trembled when I saw it go into the house. At eleven that night, just as I was retiring to rest, he began. There was a dismal buzz at first, as if some monstrous bee was in my room; then the buzz changed into a soul-freezing boom, that shook the street. This, with he-haws and deep earthquake tremblings, lasted for an hour, and then ceased. All that night

I shivered like a meek jelly in a railway station. The notes, nearly all bottom ones, and some lower than that, had entered into my nervous system. I was inoculated with discords, for the fiend was only learning to play the horrible machine. I dreamed when I slept, which was only by snatches, of whirlwinds, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes. The horrible instrument sometimes seemed to be sucking me into its vortex, and sometimes blowing me into space.

“The next night was worse, for *his* landlady complained of the noise in the house, so he opened the window when he began to practise, and blew the horrible sounds into the street. They came over to me like a deputation of drunken stentors, and almost shook the glass out of my window-frames.

“The man was asked to go away, and would not, so some few of us assembled together to take steps in the matter. While the wretch was out on business we conveyed up into my room a powerful garden watering machine. Eleven o'clock came, we were there; my window was open a little way, the nozzle of the machine was there. His window opened,

and he was there. He knew not of our presence, but we knew of his. His instrument came forth, boom! boom! boom! boom!!!

“Two men were at the pump; I held the nozzle. The focus was correct, and a mighty flood caught his shining horror in the centre, and the concert was over, the band lying on his back.

“Litigation ensued, but the man left.

“Some slight harm, you see, was done to one man, but it resulted in a blessing to many.”

Everybody present agreed as to the excellent moral to be found in Jurdon's anecdote; and although in one case people were getting what they did not want, and in the other wanting what they could not get, the narration clinched their resolution to have the ten-year-old.

Jurdon, after speaking, relapsed into deep thought for a time. Suddenly, as if bitten by a dog, he gave a great cry. Then he rolled back in his chair and laughed:

“Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! I have it; I have it! Capital! Splendid! Ha, ha, ha!”

His friends entreated him to explain. 'Twas a moment of horrible suspense. Recovering his gravity, Joshua whispered hoarsely :

“The coffin ! The coffin !”

The scene now became conspirator-like. Had it been in a cave with no gas laid on, one would have thought of brigands, pirates, and gunpowder plots.

The chairs were formed into a circle. Towker had a chair among the others, for having listened to so much of the conversation, he did not like to go away ; besides, he thought he should like to know the end of the affair. Any excitement out of the house of Jubb he enjoyed, as tending to dissipate the depression he always suffered from at home.

Jurdon leant forward in his chair, and the others leant forward in their chairs. 'Twas a sort of combined intelligence, a brain company. Words were spoken, but only in a whisper, as if the walls had ears and tongues, and might reveal what was spoken. Occasionally a speaker incautiously raised his voice, so that his remarks were audible outside the magic circle. These remarks were dis-

jointed, however, and told no story. To build up a narrative on what was heard, would be like trying to construct a staircase out of three banisters and a yard of stair-carpet.

"I'm morally certain about the first landing," said one. "It'll turn there right enough." What could be made out of this? Nothing.

"Bound to be in the chiffonier," cried another. What was bound, and why was it bound to B, any more than to C or D? One might puzzle himself over such remarks till he felt sea-sick, and then be none the wiser.

The conspiracy was planned on a Wednesday evening, and at nine o'clock on Thursday evening, there was a knock heard at Mumley's side-door.

The shop closed at eight. The manager was out for a little recreation, and the three shopmen who did not sleep in the house had gone to their respective homes.

Mr. Mumley, who was a bachelor, was in his bed-room, his old housekeeper and the small slave were down in the kitchen. No one else was in the house.

The small servant opened the door in answer to the knock, and was sent down to summon the housekeeper.

"Good evening, Mrs. Church," said Jurdon cheerily. "Mr. Mumley is improving, I hope?"

"Well, sir," replied the housekeeper, "he don't improve very fast."

"Ah," sighed Jurdon, "we are all liable to sickness, but so long as he gets no worse we must keep up his courage. I've a box here for him, he knows all about it; I'll take it up-stairs. Do you mind popping up and telling him, I've brought the box round?"

The old lady could not tell what sort of box it was, for it was judiciously kept out of sight; but knowing the speaker to be an intimate friend of her master, concluded everything was correct, and after asking Jurdon to see that the street-door was closed behind him and his box, placidly toddled upstairs to inform the invalided Benjamin of the new arrival.

As swiftly as possible under the circumstances Jurdon and a couple of other conspirators hurried upstairs with the box.

This, as may easily be guessed, was a coffin. It will be remembered that Jurdon owed Mumley one, and it appeared as if he was now anxious to act honourably in the matter.

By the time that Mrs. Church had mounted to the top of the house, knocked at her master's door, and succeeded in rousing him from a doze, the coffin had arrived in what Mumley termed his drawing-room. Quicker than the incident can be related, the gas had been lit, the two-gallon jar of ten-year-old extracted from the chiffonier, wrapped in a cloth, and placed snugly inside the box.

"If we haven't got the body of Mumley," chuckled one of the conspirators, "we've got his spirit," as he quickly popped a couple of screws into the lid and screwed it down.

Jurdon had by this time arrived outside Mumley's bed-room door, to explain matters.

"Won't you come in?" inquired Mumley.

"Not now," said Jurdon. "Had rather a queer case to-day, and as you're out of health——"

"What's that you've brought?" cried Mumley, querulously; "I could not catch what Mrs. Church said—something about a box."

“Don’t you remember our little bit of sport for a couple?” inquired Joshua, in grave, but kindly tones. The tones were good, but Jurdon’s face at the moment did not fit them.

“Goodness gracious!” cried Mumley, horrified, “you never mean to say you’ve brought a coffin here.”

“Certainly I have,” cried Jurdon; “why not? You won it fairly enough.”

“I admit I won it,” said Mumley, but he added in reproachful tones: “I call it very unkind to bring such an article into my house, while I am lying seriously ill.”

“I can’t see that,” murmured Joshua thoughtfully. “People who are well don’t want coffins, it is those who are ill, perhaps dying, who require such articles. I never troubled to bring it while you were well, but seeing you are ill and do not seem to get better, I maintain it is a thoughtful act on my part to bring it round. It is a beautiful article, I assure you, and one a duke might feel proud to put on. I measured myself for it—we are just the same height.”

“Take it away!” shouted Mumley. “Take

it away directly! I won't have it here! I call it cruel, cruel!"

"Not at all," remonstrated Jurdon; "better be too early, than too late. I should never forgive myself, if you were to go off under the impression that I meant to cheat you."

"Will you take it away?" fairly roared the invalid.

"Won't you let us bring it up for you to look at? There are a few things in it, too."

"Take it away, and all in it," howled Benjamin. "Will you take it away?"

"Oh certainly," cried Joshua in an assumed tone of offended dignity. "I'll take it away if it annoys you very much. So good-night, and a speedy return to health."

Mr. Mumley would not say good-night, he preserved a sullen silence, so Mr. Jurdon went down to the drawing-room, and told his two friends that Mr. Mumley declined to keep the box, and that they were to take it away, and all in it. So home to Jurdon's went Mr. Mumley's coffin and the ten-year-old whisky.

Nearly a score sat down in Mr. Jurdon's

breakfast parlour to analyse the ten-year-old, and a verdict of approval was given without a dissentient voice. Towker would have liked to be there, but had too much honesty, or too little courage. He let Tolliger into the secret, however, and Tolliger was there, and in good time too.

Outsiders never knew much of what happened at the undertaker's that night. Outsiders, however, revenged themselves by declaring that the insiders knew very little of what happened after the first half-hour or so of drawing the cork.

Various dark forms emerged from the house of Jurdon, in the small hours of the morning. None of these spectral individuals walked with anything like dignity. They evidently thought more of assistance than dignity. Some of them went straight home, or as straight as they could, while others rested by the way, hoping possibly that their homes would come to them. Joshua woke up next morning and found himself snug enough in Mumley's coffin. He had subsided somewhat early, and his friends considerably put him to bed.



CHAPTER X.

A slight dissertation on anatomical lasts and their danger, and an account of Mr. Jubb as a Temperance orator with experiments.

ON the particular evening when Jurdon and his friends were busy with Mumley's whisky, Towker felt particularly lonely. Mr. Jubb, not that our hero wanted his society, had gone out for a day's fishing. Tolliger was off to the undertaker's, and Isabel and the baby had accepted Ethel's invitation to an evening downstairs. About eight o'clock James went out for a walk, and without expecting to see any of the regular customers there, dropped in about nine at "The White Owl." As he fully expected, the room was deserted, and after drinking a glass of "bitter" he was walking out when a stranger

entered. He nodded to Towker, and sinking in a chair cried : " Confound these boots ! Confound my corns ! Confound my bootmaker ! and confound all bootmakers ! "

Towker expressed his sympathy, and inquired if the stranger was suffering from a corn.

" My toes are a regular cornfield," said the stranger, gloomily.

" Tight boots ? " suggested Towker.

" Yes," was the reply.

" Why not wear larger ones ? " inquired sympathetic James.

" I suppose it will come to that ; if it breaks our engagement it must. Confound it, I won't be a cripple. Excuse me, sir, I daresay you are wondering what I am referring to. With your permission, I will tell you. Sometimes we get good advice from strangers, and as there is nothing to be ashamed of in my little story, I will relate it. You must know, sir, that I am engaged to a very charming young lady."

" Yes," said Towker.

" And you must know that some few months ago I had a narrow escape of losing

her, and through dealing at the same boot shop."

"Indeed," responded James.

"Yes," continued the stranger, "the man who keeps this shop calls himself an anatomical bootmaker, and possesses some very peculiar objects in the shape of lasts. These lasts are not handsome, some of them are positively hideous, and excite feelings of incipient nausea in the internal constructions of delicate persons."

"I've seen such lasts," quoth James.

"Some of them," said the stranger, "seem to be breaking out into wooden corns and brass bunions, while others look as if every toe was a little dromedary, and the big one a Bactrian camel with two humps. Now I as you see, have a moderately sized foot and like my boots to fit me. I had ordered a pair to be made, and on one particular afternoon I dropped into Butler's shop to try them on. They fitted very fairly, but the right one wanted just a little stretching. While the anatomical snob was enlarging this boot, I was curiously examining one of the eccentric lasts we were just speaking of. It was a particularly delightful one."

“Quite a nobby affair, I suppose,” said Towker, venturing on a little joke.

“Something like the roof of a stalactite cavern turned up the other way; on a small scale,” said the stranger. “While I was looking at this, lo and behold! there was my affianced one, even at the door. I dropped the last, and concealing my stockinged foot under my ulster, which reached to the floor, I gave my sweetheart greeting, and apologised for not rising.

“To my surprise, a moment after, she turned pale and excusing herself, hurriedly departed.

“I wondered what the matter could be, and during the evening visited her abode. Having my new boots on, I did not walk with my usual ease, for new boots do not help a fellow that way.

“My lady-love, I thought, received me rather coldly. When I asked her what ailed her in the afternoon, she said, ‘Nothing;’ and, when I asked her what ailed her in the evening she said, ‘Nothing.’

“She being so curt, I became curt, and

one word leading to another I departed in a tiff. Do you follow me, sir ?”

Towker nodded.

“Then followed the usual programme,” continued the stranger; “coldness, estrangement, and misery, till at length a final meeting was arranged to return letters, presents, etc., and to say good-bye.

“It rained that night.

“The rain was, in fact, something awful. Sheets, volumes, cataracts of water came down, and I got very wet, especially about the feet. She, true woman, though her heart was breaking, brought me a pair of her father’s slippers to wear.

“Without thinking for the moment of who was standing by, I removed my wet boots and brought to light my fairly-sized, fairly-shaped feet. Then and there, sir, did this dear little faithful heart drop down on her knees, and taking my wet feet in her hands, beg that all might be forgiven and forgotten.

“Do you see, sir? When I dropped that horrible last all over lumps, and bumps, and

camels' backs, it fell right way up with three parts peeping out of my ulster, and I having concealed my natural foot, she mistook that dreadful arrangement for one of my tootsy-wootsies; and now what I am afraid of is this," continued the stranger, "if I take to wearing larger boots, I shall disappoint my lady-fair."

"Well," said Towker; "if you go on as you are going, the probability is, that you will eventually arrive at a very fair imitation of that last with both feet."

The stranger gazed upon Towker with a look of such comical alarm, and uttered such a convulsive "Good gracious! I never thought of that," that Towker could not help laughing.

Said the stranger, as he rose to go: "I shall get some bigger boots to-morrow, and I thank you for your advice, sir. Good evening." And Towker was alone again.

Mr. Towker soon after left, his attention being arrested for a moment by a couple of men who stood on the pavement making arrangements to see each other home.

One of these men had one sound leg only,

the other being made of wood. He was a stoutish man. His companion was a small, thin individual, with two human legs. These legs, however, were so tremendously bandy that walking, or rather rolling, was an extremely difficult feat for him to accomplish at any time.

With courage worthy of a better cause these two men had ventured to get exceedingly drunk.

Look at the fact and wonder, only one sound leg between two men; and yet, scorning all thoughts of peril, they ventured to get intoxicated.

What could that one leg—sound, but drunk—do with its three unfortunate companions? 'Twas an incompetent crew with an intoxicated pilot. Imagination pictures the wooden leg becoming a stumbling-block to its flesh-and-blood companions. The wooden leg could not be accused of drunkenness in itself, but being attached to an inebriated stump, and accompanied and probably surrounded at times by a leg drunk to the very toe-nails, it could do literally nothing.

These two heroes were standing in front

of an advertisement recommending somebody's malt liquors.

A bit of country occupied the lower portion of the picture. Above it, in the clouds, was a flash of lightning—it might be called a hundred thousand flashes in one. The artist's ideas of proportion in ordinary work may have been good, but when he got into the lightning business he walked off into the incredibilities. There was sufficient lightning in that flash for an entire country for one summer, with a bit over for spoilage.

As Towker passed these two toppers, one of them, the little one, said to him :

“What's that picture, guv'nor?”

“Only an advertisement,” replied Towker.

“I thought it was a accident,” said the little man. “It's lightning, ain't it?”

“It is intended for lightning,” replied Towker. “It's an advertisement of a particular sort of malt liquor.”

“And it hits you like that?” said the little man hurriedly. “Goodness! I shall stick to rum.”

Towker passed on, and, intent only on killing the time, turned down a side street.

Passing by the door of a building with a school-room look about it, an individual gave him a handbill. From this Towker saw that a Temperance Meeting was going forward, and thought he would look in for an hour; so knocking the tobacco out of his pipe, he entered.

The room was fairly filled with clean and cheerful-looking folks, and the platform was set out in the usual style, with a decanter and glass on the table. There was a chairman in the chair, and an orator was on the talk.

The subject under consideration when Towker entered, would not strike one at first as being in any way connected with the Temperance cause, being neither more nor less than the removal of a pillar-post letter-box from one point in the parish to another.

Perhaps it will be as well to let the speaker on the platform state his case. The reader will then be able to judge for himself, how far the Temperance people were justified in their attitude.

“As most of you know,” said the speaker, “the pillar-post now standing just outside ‘The Weavers’ Arms,’ till about a month ago,

stood quite two hundred yards south of that public-house.

“It appears, that some one in the parish with nothing better to do, pointed out to the authorities, that the distances from it to the next post-offices on either side were unequal, and this eventually led to its removal.

“This may seem a little matter to those who do not know how small a thing becomes temptation to the weak-minded drinker.

“I have gone right to the bottom of this question, and from inquiries made in the district, the wives are unanimous in declaring, that never before have their husbands had so many letters to post. I will not mention names, of course; but there’s Mrs. A. declares, that while Mr. A. will allow her to go out on a wet night, and catch her death o’ cold marketing, he will never put her to the trouble of posting a letter, even if the night be the finest in the whole year.

“Mrs. B. declares that her husband goes out regularly every night at eight to post a letter. She further declares the letter, which Mr. B. carries ostentatiously displayed, is a dummy and a fraud, since, and this she is

ready to affirm before any oath-administering commissioner, if this society will pay the half-crown for the affidavit, that there has not been in the house any pen or ink for the last six months.

“Mrs. C. declares that she watched her husband once as he sallied forth bearing an imposing-looking letter with two halfpenny stamps on it. According to her account, when he arrived at the pillar-post, he poked the letter half-way in, drew it out again, and popping it into his coat-tail pocket, swiftly sped into ‘The Weavers’ Arms.’

“Mrs. D. says: ‘One Friday night my husband inquired: “Is there a post-card in the house? I want to send a message to an old friend.” Being suspicious, before I gave him the card, I pricked with my needle a small hole at one of the corners. The next morning a card came addressed to my husband, containing a simple communication of no importance; but on holding it up to the light, I distinctly saw the needle hole I had made.’

“Now,” said the speaker, “having given you the evidence of others, let me give you my own.

“I went into ‘The Weavers’ Arms’ one night, and ordering a bottle of lemonade, lingered for half-an-hour, and the thing was really curious. Three or four customers were in the parlour when I arrived. I sat down without taking any notice of them, and picking up a newspaper professed to be studying its contents.

“Presently a gentleman entered bearing a wet umbrella, the night being showery. He was greeted with :

“ ‘Hallo, old fellow, how are you ?’

“ ‘Pretty well, thank you ; how are you ?’

“ ‘Oh, all right. Nasty weather, ain’t it ?’

“ ‘Yes ; I shouldn’t have come out to-night, only I had a letter to post. I shall just have a toothful before I go back. Ah, Mr. Widdle,’ —this was to a new-comer.

“ ‘Dreadful wet, is it not ?’ said Mr. Widdle. ‘It’s coming through my ceiling ; I’ve just dropped a line to my landlord asking him to have it seen to. That’s why I came out, to post the letter.’

“ ‘But old Mr. Buggins is your landlord, is he not ?’

“ ‘Yes.’

“ ‘Why, you must have passed his house to come up here.’

“ ‘Yes, I did; but it’s no use telling him of anything—he is so forgetful.’

“ ‘Oh, I see.’

“ In came another man.

“ ‘Can anybody tell me,’ he inquired, ‘what time the first collection is made in the morning? The wife and I were having an argument about it, and could not agree; so to settle the matter I said I’d just step up and see, but it’s so dark out there I can’t read the figures. I’ll take it hot, please, and no sugar.’

“ Seven more customers came in while I was there, and in every instance but one it was that magic pillar-post that dragged them from their homes.”

It was unanimously decided by the meeting that steps should be taken to try and get the post put back in its old place.

During the applause, stamping of feet, and clapping of hands, following the resolution, Towker, who was seated not far from the door, saw to his surprise the excited doorkeeper ushering in the great Jubb, looking bigger, redder, and jollier than ever.

A few words of explanation may here be given. It has been stated that Mr. Jubb had on this particular day decided to go fishing.

There was a piece of water he knew, where for the trifling sum of two shillings, he could fish from morning till night.

The water being situated at a considerable distance from any inn, and Jubb being of rather a thirsty nature, with a long, hot day in front of him, he determined, in addition to some sandwiches, to take some ale. At first he determined on taking a half-gallon; but thinking it was quite probable he would meet with some brother fisherman who would be grateful for a glass, he finally decided on burdening himself with a gallon of "mild and bitter."

On arriving at the fishing ground he was horrified to find that the place had changed hands, and no fishing was to be obtained.

Had he not been in possession of this white elephant in the shape of a gallon of ale, Jubb would probably have gone home again, but as it was, he determined to go and fish on the river; and accordingly, finding his way to the railway station, he took a ticket for Thames Ditton.

The gallon was under the seat although it was lightened to the extent of about two glasses, Jubb having found his exercise in the hot sun conducive to thirst.

Arriving at his destination, he sought the river and commenced to fish. Meeting with no luck, he had a sandwich and a glass of ale, or as near as he could guess, for he had to drink from the bottle, having accidentally broken his glass.

Then he lit his pipe and fished again. So the day progressed. No fish, but plenty of ale, sandwiches, and tobacco.

In the evening he quitted fishing, and got into the train again. On his way to "The White Owl," where the bottle belonged, he had to pass the Temperance Meeting Room, and while he paused for a moment at the vociferous noise, a lively little man popped out, and seizing him by the arm with a "This way, sir," half led, half dragged him into the meeting.

It is scarcely likely that Jubb would have gone into the room had it not been for a mistake on the part of this excited doorkeeper.

The meeting was a sort of medley. There was speechmaking, music, and singing, and an

eminent lecturer from Manchester had promised to perform various experiments with sundry liquors. He was going to extract the alcohol from these decoctions, to, as the bill put it, "drag the lurking devil from his lair."

This gentleman had not arrived, but when the doorkeeper saw Jubb with his gallon bottle he made sure he was the lecturer from Manchester, and that the gallon bottle was the lair where the devil lurked.

This idea was strengthened by the sight of Jubb's fishing-rod, covered up in a neat canvas bag. Visions of plans, diagrams, and tables of statistics flashed across his brain, and taking Jubb by the arm, by dint of pulling and hauling he managed to get him close up to the platform. Here he left him, after seeing that he was comfortably seated.

Jubb hardly knew what to make of it. He knew nothing about the lecturer from Manchester. He thought it curious that the doorkeeper should have taken so much interest in him, but put it down that he was probably a good-natured fellow who would have done the like to any one else. Nothing did he know of the lurking devil. He

guessed there was about a pint of ale in his bottle, and to tell the truth he would have been very glad to have got at it, for the exertion of getting through the crowd, and the heated state of the room, made him feel very thirsty.

The doorkeeper had meanwhile put it well about that the eminent lecturer had arrived with his diabolical lurker, and a considerable number of eyes were focussing Jubb and his bottle.

Towker was puzzled, but awaited events patiently. He could not see Jubb's face, as that worthy facing the platform had his back to the audience.

A lady now performed very prettily on the piano, and the music being of a dreamy nature Jubb indulged in a sort of half-nap.

Then the chairman arose and made a speech, the object of which was to introduce the lecturer from Manchester to the meeting, and just as Jubb was on the point of entering the land of Nod, the chairman was saying: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, it is with the utmost pleasure that I introduce to you Mr. Mompas, from Manchester. Mr. Mompas!" and he

leaned over the rail and spoke to Jubb, "Are you ready?" That woke Jubb right up, and the next moment he was woke up still more, for two attendant demons fell on to his property. One seized his bottle and marched it up on to the platform, depositing it with a goodly bang on the chairman's table. The other followed with the fishing rod in its canvas bag.

To say that Jubb was puzzled at this point of the proceedings does not meet the case.

"Mr. Mompass, are you ready?" inquired the affable chairman again, with a smile.

It was now quite evident to Jubb that he was mistaken for somebody else, and a very different somebody else too; but at this supreme moment, courage came to his aid, and he rose boldly, and mounted the platform. He was not quite clear as to the course he intended to pursue. He had, however, settled this much, that his bottle and fishing-rod were not going to be confiscated without a struggle.

Arrived on the platform, amid a storm of applause, he whispered to the chairman:

"There is a mistake somewhere."

"What?" said the chairman jerkily, as he

reached for one of the bills of the meeting, and ran his finger along it. "No mistake, sir. See here—Mr. Mompass, eminent scientific authority—experiments—drag the lurking devil from its lair, etc."

Here the applause ceased, and Jubb felt that he must do something. Rising and facing the audience, he said :

"Ladies and gentlemen—I am no orator; and I—I—I—simply stand here—no—I mean—I'm not here to—to—make a speech. There is a mistake—a—a—somewhere. I am not Mr. Mompass!"

A thrill of suppressed excitement passed through the audience. Possibly they thought he was the lurker from his lair, and that he would proceed to extract Mr. Mompass from the bottle.

"It is all a mistake," continued Jubb. "I've been forced up here somehow; I hardly know how, but (and Jubb paused as he reflected on the possible danger of his contemplated joke) as Mr. Mompass does not seem to have arrived, I will endeavour, as far as lies in my power, to perform one of his experiments. Yes," cried Jubb, growing bolder

as he got thirstier; "you shall see me draw the lurking devil from its lair"; and, drawing the cork of the bottle amid breathless excitement, he applied the lip of the gallon bottle to his mouth, and the lurker came out from his lair, and passed into Jubb.

The deed was done so quickly, and the meeting was taken so thoroughly by surprise, that Jubb got through nearly all the contents of the bottle before a sound was heard. The audience seemed spell-bound. The chairman sat stony-eyed and statue-like; but a mingled sound of groans, hisses, and some few huzzas fell upon Jubb's ear as he removed the bottle from his lips.

Jubb did not wait for any vote of thanks. He picked up his fishing-rod and popping down the platform steps, obtained possession of his hat, and in company with his gallon bottle sought the way out. He turned for one moment to see how the chairman looked.

There was no change there. He sat like a mesmerised man without speech or motion.

The little doorkeeper and two or three others were for giving Jubb in charge, but Towker, anxious to make the big Jubb a

friend, got amongst them, and tapping his forehead and looking significantly at Jubb, whispered the word, "Dangerous!"

The idea of a giant like Jubb braining them one after the other with his gallon bottle proved too much for them, and they fell back and so allowed Jubb and Towker to pass out together.

Jubb was very much surprised and a good deal confused on finding that Towker had seen and heard all. "And," said Towker, "it was a good job I was there. They'd have given you into custody if I had not frightened them;" and he explained how he managed it.

Jubb laughed, and then said:

"Mr. Towker, we're good friends, are we not?"

"Yes, Mr. Jubb."

"You would do me a good service if you could?"

"Yes, sir, certainly."

"So would I you."

"Yes."

"Mrs. Jubb must never know of this, Mr. Towker. I wouldn't have her know it for fifty pounds. Will you faithfully promise me never to tell her?"

"I will."

"Your hand on it."

"There it is."

"Mr. Towker, you won't tell Mrs. Towker nor Mr. Tolliger?"

"I promise you faithfully I will not."

"Nor any one else?"

"My lips are sealed."

"Towker, old boy, you're a jolly good fellow, and if ever it lies in my power to serve you, depend upon my doing so."

Towker thanked Jubb, and said that at present he did not require Jubb's aid in anything; but there was a man who had threatened him with personal violence a long time ago, and he went in some little fear of him. Could he depend on Jubb taking his part if ever they came to a quarrel?

"Towker, old boy," said Jubb, "depend on me. He shall not hurt you—no one shall hurt you—while I'm by."

Towker that night felt much more comfortable than usual. Jubb was his friend, ay, his champion



CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Jubb as a captive-worrier. The unhappy Towker confides in his fellow-lodger.

H E longer Towker pondered over his position, the less fear he entertained of Mr. Jubb. His fear now, or his principal fear, was the use Ethel might put his letters and verses to. He saw with dissatisfaction the growing friendship or apparent friendship between his wife Isabel and Mrs. Jubb. He doubted the honesty of Mrs. Jubb's friendship towards his wife, and felt convinced she was only professing so much in order to add somehow to her weapons of offence. In one way she did this by having her name constantly flung into Towker's teeth by Isabel. It was, "Mrs. Jubb thinks this, or Mrs.

Jubb says that," till Towker grew heartily sick of hearing her name.

One afternoon when he came home he found the furniture all shifted. The sofa was where the piano should be, and the piano where the sofa should be. His arm-chair had marched to the other side of the fire-place, and several of the pictures were moved; the smaller table had been dragged from under the bedstead, and the larger one had been made to take its place. The room looked quite strange to Mr. Towker.

"Why, Isabel!" he cried in amazement; "whatever have you been doing?"

"Oh, Mrs. Jubb thought it would look better rearranged, and she's so kind, she's been helping me to do it."

Towker was heavily hit, but he disdained to show it. He did venture to say:

"I think you might have consulted me first." He said this rather sharply.

"Why, James," said Isabel with a little pout, "we did it to surprise and please you."

"The surprise is all right," said Towker somewhat sarcastically; "I'd better sit down and wait till the pleasure arrives."

Isabel retorted :

“There is no pleasing some people.” And retired to see how baby was getting on.

James saw Mrs. Jubb’s hand pretty clearly now, and guessed that her intention was to sow the seeds of dissension between Isabel and himself, but he determined to thwart her, whatever it cost him, having hope in his heart to some day escape.

On Isabel’s reappearance, therefore, he said :

“Perhaps you are right, my dear ; there is certainly more room here with the smaller table, and my arm-chair is, I think, better with its back to the window, so let us say no more about it.”

Isabel smiled, all her good-nature was restored, and the meal passed off happily.

James had a further trial a few days later, for having requested his wife to get him some more collars, his stock needing replenishing, he was greatly disgusted at finding the collars purchased by her were of a stick-up, all-round sort. His usual collar was of a comfortable turned-down pattern, and he felt sure that the new ones would be far less comfortable.

"You've made a mistake, Isabel," said Towker, "these collars are the wrong pattern."

"I know they are different to usual, James," replied his wife, "but Mrs. Jubb says these are all the fashion."

Towker blew his nose violently, and said something to his pocket-handkerchief about Mrs. Jubb, but Isabel did not hear what it was.

"Patience," murmured Towker, "patience. If I can only get hold of those accursed letters, I'll defy her."

Many and many an hour did he pensively smoke and dream of the wildest schemes to secure his MS. He even thought of confessing all to Jubb himself, and of begging that gentleman to do his best to secure the precious papers. Jubb had promised to serve him if it lay in his power.

Towker, however, hesitated. Jubb was evidently a little afraid of Mrs. Jubb, and if she caught him searching about for something in a felonious fashion, she would probably drag the secret from him, and then in her violence blurt out her story to Isabel.

Again, Mrs. Jubb doubtless had these

papers in some hidden and secure place, and probably Jubb would not be able to discover them.

Again, Jubb might decline so delicate a task.

Moreover, if Jubb accepted the commission and executed it, would he then consider he had rendered Towker service sufficient, and so consider himself entitled, if he were so minded, to horsewhip and strangle him.

Of course, thought James, I still possess his secret about the teetotal meeting, but a secret cannot be divulged by a dead man. Jubb, in fact, might consider it a good opportunity to get rid of one who knows too much.

Thus did the unhappy man argue, while his unforgiving and unfeeling landlady behaved like an angel when others were by, and worried him like a savage dog when she met or saw him alone.

With a more triumphant chuckle than ordinary she greeted him in his stand-up collars, and malignantly whispered as they passed: "Did 'em nearly choke him?" causing Towker to think of Jubb's threat; but here

she failed to produce fear, for Towker felt secure in Jubb's promise, though it was given unwittingly.

On the whole, Towker thought he'd leave things alone for a bit. He determined however to sound Tolliger as to his opinion of Mrs. Jubb. It might pay him, he thought, to some day confide in Tolliger, and by hints of unknown future rewards, enlist him in his service.

Tolliger had not felt so much gratitude towards Towker as that gentleman expected for his information concerning the whisky to be had at Jurdon's for nothing. The fact was, its gratuitous distribution led to the fall of Tolliger figuratively and literally; for not only did the company assembled at Jurdon's ply Tolliger with copious libations, but when these libations began to take effect, and Tolliger evinced a wish to depart, they put a small quantity—'twas too good to waste—into his hat, and when he placed that article on his head, some one jammed it down so tightly that the whisky could not escape. On reaching home, he, finding he could not discover the keyhole, was compelled to knock. Mrs.

Jubb, who was sitting up for the Temperance orator, opened the door rather suddenly, and Tolliger, who was leaning against it, fell into her arms. She, with a scream, let him fall on to the door-mat. Off went his hat, and his whisky-scented head at once converted the hall into a distillery.

Jubb and Towker providentially arrived on the scene, and conveyed the indiscreet Tolliger to bed.

The unfortunate young man received such a rating from Mrs. Jubb the next day, and was so laughed at by Jubb and Towker, and felt so uncommonly bad, that he sulked for a week. Finding, however, that this kept Towker's tobacco-pouch out of his room, he condescended to come out of his sulks, and things went on in the old usual style.

"What is your honest opinion of Mrs. Jubb, Tolliger?" inquired James.

"Well," said Tolliger, "I don't think so much of her as I used to. I admit I gave her some cause for vexation, but for her to call me a drunken fool and intoxicated imbecile, and to say that I am always drunk, and that I make Jubb drunk, is gross exaggeration."

tion. I assure you, Towker," said Tolliger solemnly, for it really was the truth, "the other night was the first time in my life I was ever intoxicated. I am like you, I enjoy a pipe and an occasional glass of ale, sometimes grog, and that is sufficient. The affair at Jurdon's was different. The whisky went down like milk, and when I asked for more water, they poured it out of a jug, and I've found out since, that it was whisky they poured in and not water at all. Therefore, for that woman to accuse me as she did, convinces me, sir, that she is a gross exaggerator, to say nothing stronger. However, I shall not forget it; some day perhaps, I shall be able to pay her back in her own coin."

Why, here was fate, or chance, or something, literally flinging Tolliger at Towker's head, and crying out, "Here's another recruit."

"Mr. Tolliger," said Towker with emotion, "look at me!"

Tolliger looked.

"You consider yourself," continued Towker, "hardly dealt with by Mrs. Jubb, but in me you behold a man who is being dealt with much harder by the same person."

"Is it possible?" gasped Tolliger. "Why, she seems to be so fond of you, that sometimes really, you know, if I were Jubb, I should begin to be a little jealous."

Towker opened his eyes. This was a new view of the situation, and one he had not thought of. Jubb jealous! Possessed by the green-eyed monster, what would not the huge Jubb be capable of? Towker did not care to look at such a contingency. Ethel and himself old sweethearts too, and carefully hiding that fact from their respective partners! Jubb jealous! Isabel jealous! What a state of affairs!

Could he trust Tolliger? He hardly saw how he was to escape after what he had said about his landlady, and concluded, whatever might come of it, to confide in his fellow-lodger.

"Tolliger," said James in a low voice, "we have known each other some time now; can I confide in you?"

"Towker," said Tolliger. "You can!"

"Then here goes! Mrs. Jubb is an old sweetheart of mine."

Tolliger winked.

"Pray do not wink," cried Towker, sadly ;
"this is no winking matter."

"I'm extremely sorry, but I meant by that to give you to understand that I now see why she is so fond of you."

Towker smiled sadly, and laying his hand on Mr. Tolliger's knee, said with emphasis :

"On the contrary, she hates me with a hatred that is positively devilish !"

Tolliger stared.

"Some six years ago," continued Mr. Towker, "Ethel May—May was her maiden name—and myself, were engaged. I thought her, at the beginning of our engagement, an angel, and believed there was not her equal upon the earth.

"Owing to the violence of my passion, and the fact that I could only meet her once a week, I wrote her many letters"—here James blushed—"and many foolish verses.

"After being engaged some few months, my circumstances altered, and I saw her every night, or nearly every night, and learned of course, to know more about her. Then I altered my opinion as to her being an angel. She was jealous without cause, exacting to

exasperation, and ready to quarrel about the smallest trifle. My life became miserable, and I lost my affection for her. That is to say, I felt, despite her good points (for she had many of them) that if we ever married, we should both be miserable. Having arrived at that conclusion, I broke off the engagement, and bade her good-bye.

"She refused to return my letters, and denounced me to all our mutual friends and acquaintances as a villain of the deepest dye."

"How came you to live here, after such unpleasantnesses?" inquired Tolliger.

Towker told him how that occurred.

"Now," continued the unhappy James, "I am her prisoner. I've told you of her threats to denounce me to Mr. Jubb, and to expose me to my own wife. She, as you perceive, is ready to say anything when she is in a passion, and what she would invent, backed by those miserable documents, would, I feel sure, ruin the peace of mind of my wife.

"As to Jubb, I don't think much of what she says he will do, for we are excellent friends,"

Of course Towker had another reason for feeling secure with Mr. Jubb, but this was not to be revealed.

“Now, Tolliger, I’ve trusted you fully,” said Towker; “you will not betray me.”

“Never!” cried Tolliger, gripping his companion’s hand. “Have no fear of me. What a heartless hypocrite the woman must be! I should like to see her served out.”

Towker sighed, and said:

“I must confess to at times feeling enmity towards her, but I have no desire for revenge. If I could escape, I should be satisfied; but while she holds those letters I feel I must remain here.”

“By-the-bye,” said Tolliger, “Jubb tells me he’s going to spend a week or two at Yarmouth shortly; if she goes we may have a chance to find these letters.”

“If she goes,” said Towker excitedly, “I’ve made up my mind to be off. You can help me there. Introduce the subject of flitting before my wife. Tell of a place you know very cheap, but must be taken at once. See, I’ll get particulars, and you can set them forth.”

“You can tell my wife on the quiet too, that the neighbourhood is doing me no good; that I’m getting a little too thick with some of these prank-players round about here, and hint that as the father of a family, I should do better somewhere else.”

“I understand,” said Tolliger with a friendly smile. “I’ll tell her that you get intoxicated, fight the police, flirt with the barmaids, play at billiards, bagatelle, skittles, cards, dice, and Tommy Dodd, and that your morals are growing weaker, and your language stronger, etc. etc.”

“No, no!” cried the horrified Towker, as his friend ran on; “that would be almost as bad as having the letters read. When it comes to the time, I’ll tell you what to say.”





CHAPTER XII.

The need to start experiments on a scientific basis. Something about a dog, and something more about two other dogs.

AN evening or two after Towker's conversation with Tolliger, the weather being a bit showery, James found himself at "The White Owl" rather earlier than usual.

The stranger whose terrible adventure with the anatomical bootmaker's last had interested our hero, was present. His name, it transpired, was Mr. Fielder. He shook hands with Towker, and informed him confidentially that he intended to get married in a few months' time; also that he had procured larger boots, and that his previous sufferings from corns were well-nigh forgotten.

Two or three of the regular customers

were in the room, and two or three strangers who had sought refuge from a shower. One of these was a tall man accompanied by his dog, a rather lean fox-terrier.

Conversation was going on briskly on various topics, when the door opened and Jurdon came in with Mr. Pommer, now commonly known among his friends as the "Assassin." Both these gentlemen were in rather a damaged condition, their clothes being wet and soiled with mud, and each held in his hand the wreck of an umbrella.

A shout of laughter greeted the two scarecrows, and two or three voices in chorus inquired if Mr. Pommer had another birthday on.

Jurdon, taking upon himself the burden of explaining matters, said :

"Here you behold the fearful results of an experiment. You see the night—dark ! You see the night—wet ! Pommer and I met half a mile from here, and each armed with an umbrella made for this house.

"The rain blew in our teeth ! Now for the experiment. I had heard of its usefulness, but had never practised it."

"And never will again," interpolated Pommer.

"I held my umbrella over both our heads, and before both our faces," continued Jurdon. "Pommer held his lower down, before our bodies and knees. The plan worked capitally. Splendid! only our boots getting wet, and we came along full sail, and chatting to our heart's content.

"We were coming along Burton Lane where the path is rather narrow, when there was an earthquake, a cyclone, a charge of cavalry, and a change of government all rolled into one, and served up hot.

"A man with a big feather bed on his head, it afterwards transpired, had been travelling in the opposite direction to us. The bed hung over his eyes, so that while he could see the path he could not see us. Our umbrellas hid the man from us, hence the catastrophe.

"Pommer was accommodated with a back seat in the hedge, I occupied a private lounge in the gutter, with the feather-bed on top of me, while the bed-carrier converted himself into a wild war-whooper in immediate want of seven policemen."

"I sympathise with you gentlemen, in your

misfortune," said the man with the dog; "but it is only by experiments that the world improves. After this you will know what to do. A gap of three inches between the two umbrellas would have made your travelling safe."

"I fully agree with you, sir," said Mr. Fielder to the stranger, "that without experiment there would be no progress; but I suppose it is because I am unlucky, for I've experimented in various ways for many years, and I think that most of those experiments have been ignominious failures."

"I have a friend," replied the man with the dog, "who complains exactly as you do, and I can often see where he fails."

"In the first place, he usually starts before he's properly ready, being a man of a very impatient nature. This of itself handicaps the simplest experiment."

"Then he does not properly weigh the probabilities of success against the probabilities of failure. If he weighs them at all, he, taking advantage of no one looking, heaps into the probability of success scale about a hundred-weight of two-carat hopes that no one with any sense would pick up."

“Experimenters must go slow, and feel their way. Now if I took hold of a strange dog like this,” he seized his dog by the tail; “he would in all probability bite me.”

“Doubtless,” said Mr. Fielder. The dog’s owner then standing up, held his dog suspended in the air by his tail; and then advancing to the middle of the room, swung him three times round his head, and gently dropped him on the floor.

Some of the witnesses of this feat murmured and said they considered it an act of cruelty; but Mr. Fielder remarked: “He quite seems to like it.”

“Like it!” said the dog’s master with a smile; “the word ‘like’ is weak, watery, and boneless. He loves it; he doats on it; why, ’tis meat, drink, dreams, and pocket-money to him. If I did not give that dog a few turns every day he would pine, sicken, and die.”

“Surely not?” interrupted Mr. Fielder.

“He would though,” continued the dog’s owner. “If I wanted to destroy that dog’s reason, blight his prospects, and blast all his flowery hopes, I should simply discontinue his daily allowance of swing. Look at this. I

had occasion to be taken away from home on business a short time ago, for about a week. Late one night I returned and went to bed. Now I always sleep with my door a little ajar, with a wedge fixed so that no one can push it open any wider.

"In the morning I awoke. The dog had been let into the house by the servant; he evidently nosed my presence, and now, look at this, he was outside my bed-room door, and there was his tail stuck into my room, asking as plainly as possible for a little of his lately neglected daily exercise."

"How was it you commenced experimenting in such a curious direction?" inquired Mr. Fielder.

"Well," replied the stranger with a laugh, "I shall have to criminate myself; but I suppose no one will take the trouble to prosecute me now over the matter, so I don't mind telling you.

"Some four years ago I wanted to go about forty miles down into the country, and I wanted to take 'Ben,' here, with me. He was then about eighteen months old. Owing to the exchequer being low, I felt that I

could not well afford to buy a dog ticket, so fell to wondering how I was to get 'Ben' down free of expense. It was necessary I should carry him in some disguised fashion. I held him up by the nape of his neck, and he kicked; by the skin of his back, and he howled. Then I seized him by his tail, and he made no objection. I held him thus quite five minutes and he never stirred. I repeated the experiment with the same success. Then I got an uncut newspaper, and in a quiet nook of the railway station-yard, I rolled him up in this and bade him lie still. Ben had been well trained and was a very obedient dog. Taking him by the tail, which was also covered by the newspaper, I got my ticket, passed through the gate, got into a third-class carriage, and hid Ben under the seat, placing him in such a position that he was quite comfortable, for he licked my hand and winked at me as much as to say he knew what I was doing.

"On arriving at my destination I took 'Ben' out through the station in the same fashion; he looked something like a large hare wrapped up in paper. It was night, and I had to

pass, shortly after quitting the station-yard, through rather a dark archway. I paused here with the intention of cutting the twine which kept my parcel together, when I was suddenly confronted by two rough fellows who demanded a shilling. Without thinking of what my parcel was in the agitation of the moment, I stepped back a pace and swung 'Ben' round my head. Down went one of the fellows, and the next moment 'Ben,' having broken bounds, had the other by his calf. Come on 'Ben,' rain's over now. Good night, gentlemen." And the owner of the dog was gone.

The relation of this incident and the sight of "Ben" being converted into a whirligig excited Mr. Fielder's admiration and also envy. He possessed a couple of nice little fox-terriers, and he was anxious to cram them with all possible accomplishments. On the very next evening, therefore, he, in his back garden, or rather his father's back garden, proceeded to knock resolve into action. Without pausing to weigh the probabilities of success against the probabilities of failure, he proceeded to lift his terriers by their respective tails, as if he intended to weigh them.

The dogs stood it very fairly, and then Mr. Fielder, delighted by his success, ventured to give each animal just one swing round. This came off very creditably, although the dogs seemed scarcely able to comprehend their new drill. They sat down and looked at their owner, as if uncertain whether it was a sort of birthday treat, or an exercise they might regard as part of their daily routine. Then they looked at each other as if to compare notes, and form a trades union if necessary, to protect themselves. Finally, they had a look round to see if their tails were at anchor in their usual places, but all the while they uttered no cry of either alarm, indignation, or astonishment.

Mr. Fielder presently turned his attention to his Indian clubs, and started for a little exercise. He used heavy clubs, and as he was twirling them round the idea suddenly occurred to him that his dogs were not much heavier than his clubs.

Then a grand idea, or what he thought was a grand idea, struck him. Why not do a bit of "Mugdah" with his terriers? And he concluded to try the experiment.

He did try it, but only for once, and for a very little time. Seizing a tail with a dog at the end of it in either hand, he started on a long swing, but the novel form of his clubs threw him out of correct time, and he managed somehow to bring the "twa dogs" together just over his head. Naturally, one fox-terrier, seeing another fox-terrier coming at him in mid-air, smelt conflict; so the two animated clubs made a desperate grab at each other, and came down kerwollop on to Mr. Fielder's head and shoulders, causing him to quit his experiment sooner than he anticipated.

For the next five minutes there seemed to be quite a crowd of dogs and Fielders all over that back garden.

These were dogs of blood, and the man had sent all the blood into their heads, so they wanted to bite, and they bit whatever they could catch hold of, whether it was dog or Fielder.

When their owner kicked them off himself, they flew at each other, and when he beat them off each other, they went at him again.

On leaving the chemist's, where he had

been to get his wounds attended to, he encountered Towker, who was just entering the shop to purchase something for the baby's comfort.

As they walked up the street together, he told Towker how he'd served his dogs, and how they had served him.

Towker expressed his surprise at Fielder's reckless conduct, and that individual replied with a sad smile:

"Ah, my friend, you don't know me. I am a victim to an unbending fate, a man in the galling chains of an evil destiny."

Towker stared, for Fielder's manner was impressive.

"The desire to make a pair of clubs of my dogs came on to me without a moment's notice, and I had to go through with it. A victim to these sudden impulses I have ever been, and I am sadly afraid I shall continue to be."

"I do not quite understand," said Towker; "surely these temptations must be fightable. You should resist them. Do they spring, do you think, from an over-excitabile brain, or

a will rendered useless by never being used? What is your theory concerning them?"

"I really do not know," replied Fielder, thoughtfully, "if there is a theory attached to them. The word 'theory' has a healthy, respectable, and scientific sound about it, but these sudden impulses are unhealthy, disreputable, and unscientific breakings out of the emotions, or feelings, or whatever happens to be on top at the time."

"The poet's creature of impulse," said Towker, with a smile, "is generally presented as a delightful being."

"Simply a crammer!" cried Fielder. "I ought to know if being, doing, and suffering like a humanised verb, entitles me to know. Some few years ago when I was worse in the way I'm speaking of than I now am, I had not a friend or acquaintance but what shunned me. I've known them, on seeing me approach, get on to omnibuses or into cabs to avoid me.

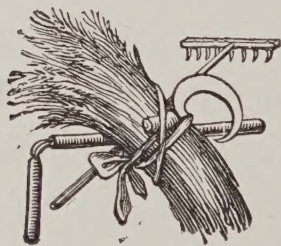
"On one occasion one climbed a ladder and got high up on to a scaffolding; another stepped into a second-hand shower-bath at a pawnbroker's door and pulled the curtains

round him; yet another popped into a sentry box and hid behind a grenadier, while one, being almost at his wit's end, slid down into a publican's cellar on a barrel of bitter.

"The fact is, at that time I was always getting into trouble through giving way to these sudden impulses; and as a drowning man catches at a straw, so I used to catch at my friends; and as the straw goes down with the drowning man, so on many occasions did they go down with me.

"Some day, Mr. Towker, I will relate a few of the incidents in my career, and then I'm sure I shall have your sympathy."

"You have it now," said Towker, and the two parted.





CHAPTER XIII.

Some pathetic incidents in the career of a victim to sudden impulses.

SOME few evenings after Mr. Fielder's fox-terrier experiment, he said to our friend Towker as they sat smoking their pipes sitting on a stile that overlooked a very pleasant panorama of fields and trees, "I shall now make good my promise, and you will then see how hard it is for a man with the natural or unnatural bias towards wrong-doing that possesses me at times, to keep away from mischief."

Towker nodded, to show that his mind was at attention.

"I have never been for long together out of trouble, since I was six years of age," sighed Mr. Fielder. "I have not the slightest doubt I was in trouble up to that time, but

my memory knows nothing of the first six years of my existence. I always look upon those days of my infancy as happy days, simply because I cannot recollect them. It is a negative kind of bliss, but as I never had much of a positive sort, I put up with it."

"I distinctly remember the time when I was just six years of age. Then I may say I first became acquainted with the furrows of care. These are generally supposed to appear on the forehead, and to be the work of time; mine however were not on my forehead, and were the work of a halfpenny cane. I will relate the incident, with your permission."

"If it will not give you too much pain," Towker replied, "I shall be pleased to hear it."

Mr. Fielder said rather sorrowfully, "I don't see why you should be pleased to hear that I suffered."

"Very well," said Towker with a smile, "I'll amend my observation. Letting the conventional slide, I will now say that I shall be extremely distressed at a recital of the melancholy incident."

Fielder expressed himself satisfied with

Towker's amended interpolation, and resumed his tragedy. "One day we had a visitor call, a dear old gentleman he was. My father rose to receive him. The old gentleman advanced to grasp my father by the hand, and laid his hat upon the table. It was a new hat, I could tell that by its extreme glossiness and unsoiled lining. Without consciousness of doing right or wrong—I was but a child—without meaning to do either, I simply obeyed an impulse which was too powerful to be resisted, and, while they were giving each other 'Good morning,' quietly placed that beautiful hat—I never saw a nicer—in my father's chair, well knowing that he would sit upon it, and when he arose with as much anger on his face as could crowd itself on to a countenance already fully occupied by astonishment, I said with a smile, 'I put it there, father.'"

"What did your father say?" asked Towker.

"My father, who was a calm man," replied Fielder, "said: 'All right, my little son, I am perfectly aware of that fact, since hats do not possess the power of locomotion. Your information is therefore superfluous, and under the circumstances also possesses some of the

minor characteristics of impertinence. Nevertheless, on the whole, I am pleased with your candour, but at the same time I feel it on my mind to declare to you, that I consider it imperative to put something in somewhat the same position as regards *your* corporeal structure, but it won't be a hat; no, it won't be a hat!—and it was not a hat, although it was felt."

Mr. Towker was about to ask Mr. Fielder, why he condescended to drag in such an abomination of a pun, but before he could speak, Fielder was knee-deep in his painful memories again:

"When I was about ten years of age," continued that unfortunate man, "there was one particular shop I used to pass on my road to school, and I seldom passed it without pausing for a moment or two to glance in at the window. The shop in question, was a pie shop, a penny pie shop. I believe there were pies of larger dimensions, and possibly of superior quality, retailed at twopence each, but these were for wealthier citizens than the majority of the purchasers. It was customary, however, to dub such places penny pie shops.

I did not look into the window because I was hungry, nor did I have a desire to taste the wares for experimental purposes, as you will guess, when I tell you, that it was the mystery attending their production which attracted me. Bigger boys than myself, used to whisper as we passed the place, 'Do you know what them pies is made of, little 'un? Puppies, and dogs and cats, that's what they're made of, and no error.'

"One day I saw gazing down into the unholy-looking area of this pie shop, a lean and hungry dog. There was dejection in his eye, and misery in the droop of his tail. Misfortune had rubbed all his hair the wrong way, and want had personally bestowed several years on the undue development of his ribs. The story of the big boys flashed on my mind. It seemed to me that the unhappy brute was weeping at the grave of some of his relations. Ever of a sensitive disposition, my eyes filled with tears, and I wept. My sympathy was also mixed with horror. In fancy I beheld the bare-armed pieman issue forth with bloodthirsty intent, and take possession of the animal. Then came the sudden

impulse; I clutched that gaunt brute by the tail and tried to drag him from his doom. In another moment I was yelling with pain, and wishing with all my might that my right leg was a wooden one, for the beast had a large portion of it well in his wolfish jaws. In my agitation I forgot to let go of his tail; and in his delight at getting hold of a good mouthful of something that seemed eatable, he forgot to let go of my leg, so there we remained; he wondering if I meant to constitute myself permanent owner of his wretched carcase, and I wondering when he would be done with my quivering joint, and making the neighbourhood hideous with my outcry. Things might have lasted like this for a long time, but happily for me they did not. A ragged dirty man rushed suddenly out of the shop with his mouth full of pie and his face full of wrath, and knocked me over for interfering with his property, as he roared out: 'Let go o' my dawg! Let go o' my dawg, will yer!'"

"I should have thought," said Mr. Towker, in a tone of sympathy, "that these sharp punishments would have made you hesitate before indulging in such foolish freaks."

"I never had any time to hesitate," returned Fielder, mournfully. "Hesitation would have given common sense time to whisper in my ear, and I should have been saved many a pang. Take another incident.

"At school a boy named Clocker had given me a piece of Indian ink. This Clocker was a boy of one idea: nothing was useful to him that he could not eat. He never troubled as to whether things digested. If an article was chewable and not nasty, he would simply eat it. I recollect, on one occasion, some aunt or uncle presented him with a small tambourine. Before the day was out he'd ate the parchment and exchanged the frame for a turnip, which he very soon made an end of. There was a rumour in the school that, on one occasion, when his parents lost a favourite kitten, he had devoured it; but we mostly regarded this accusation as legendary.

"Where Clocker got the Indian ink from I do not know. He ate part of it, and not caring for the flavour, gave me the remaining portion in exchange for an India-rubber ball, alleging as a reason that he thought the ball contained more nourishment. The transfer was

effected outside the shop of old Mr. White, greengrocer and coalman. The Indian ink was wet and sticky, and I looked round for some place to dry the wet part on before I deposited my prize in my pocket, and almost before I knew what I was at, I found myself calmly altering the figure '1' into a '2,' at one bold stroke, raising the price of best Wallsends from 1s. 4*d.* to 2s. 4*d.* per cwt. I had scarcely effected the alteration when Mr. White espied me; out he came and away I ran. An exciting chase ensued; but it did not last long, for in turning the second corner I bounded right into the arms of a stout policeman, knocking the breath out of his body, and causing an overset of both of us. Without waiting to get up, the officer of the law constituted himself into a judge, jury, and executioner. Mr. White was waiting for me when the policeman had done with my body, and when the coalman had metaphorically taken his pound of flesh, he handed me over to the constable again.

"There never was a sorer boy, or a sorrier, than he who lay in my bed that night."

“And still you continued your mad career?” said Mr. Towker interrogatively.

“Yes,” replied Fielder with a sigh. “Not, mind you, but what I sometimes escaped punishment of the sort I have been describing. And here comes in a curious bit of mental working, which, while it seems inconsistent with my foolish and mischievous actions, goes part of the way to show that there was some good in me.

“On occasions when I escaped ‘scot free,’ as we say, I suffered more mental anguish, and felt more ashamed of myself than when I got caught in the act and suffered summary chastisement. When I did wrong, and suffered for it, I felt as if I had made some reparation, and so managed to jog on with a little cheerfulness, but when I escaped pains and penalties, then my mental suffering was sometimes prodigious—worse, in fact, than the other sort.”

“You should have waited for the last act on such occasions,” said Towker philosophically.

“Ah, I had not the courage,” replied Mr. Fielder.

“You had the courage to perform the exploit,” cried Towker.

“Yes,” assented Fielder, “and that was all. Courage is a coward often and often. He comes when you don’t want him, and when you require his aid, he’s gone away and left no address. Here is an instance. One evening (this was when I was quite a young man), about shop-shutting time I was passing by an egg and butter store. Several shutters were already in their places for the night, and the remainder were coming up one at a time from the cellar beneath the shop. One man was at the bottom pushing each shutter up over a roller, and another man was at the top receiving them, and fixing them in their proper places.

“If these men had gone quietly along with their business, all would have been well, but just as I came up they were evidently in the act of quarrelling. The top man was leaning half-way over a shutter which made a nice inclined plane with a smooth surface. He was a tall thin man, so that his head was almost down the trap-door. Be kind enough to appreciate my position, Mr. Towker, and also his. I heard him shout to the man below, ‘Wait till I come down, and you’ll see!’ At

that moment the impulse came. I could not resist it. I said cheerfully, 'Why wait?' and catching hold of his hinder garments, lifted his legs and gave his body a downward push. His lower extremities immediately became his upper extremities, and down the surface of that shutter he went like a skilful diver. His head struck the other man in his shirt-front. With a cry of anguish *he* sat down in a partly filled egg-chest. What happened after that I am not in a position to state. My desire was to see the man go down into the cellar; this I had seen; I had no desire to see him come up again, and so I went in pursuit of my courage which had gone round the nearest corner at the rate of ten miles an hour."

"You would probably have been made to suffer severely had you been captured on that occasion," remarked Mr. Towker.

Fielder gave a little shiver as he thought of the suffering he had escaped, and then observed: "I intended to relate no more at present, but you seem to be of a sympathetic nature, and that makes me in a communicative mood; if you are not tired of playing

the listener, I will relate one more instance, an instance in which I was not so fortunate as to escape, ah!" and Fielder heaved a deep sigh; "that occurred two years ago, and I am living now a life of fear in consequence of it." And here Fielder glanced round in every direction, as if he feared some hidden listener.

Towker felt a little alarmed and said: "Don't, don't tell me if—if it's anything I ought not to know; if it partakes of the nature of a felony, or act of arson, or—murder, I would much rather not know of it."

Fielder gave a sad smile, and said: "Oh, no, it is nothing of that sort; you need not fear being made an accessory after the fact. I admit I shall place myself in your power somewhat, but I have no fear that you will denounce me. Here is the incident:

"I was staying at Brighton for a few days two summers ago. Strolling on the bank one day, I felt suddenly moved to pick up a deceased jelly-fish. You know what a jelly-fish is, of course—a creature that looks as if it been made in a mould."

"What on earth did you intend to do with it?" inquired Towker.

“I do not know,” replied Fielder, “or rather, I should say, I did not know at the time. I had no intention of eating it, nor had I the remotest intention of starting a museum or aquarium. I walked along the esplanade a short distance with my prize in my hand, taking no notice of the remarks made by passers-by. Presently, looking over the railing, I espied seated on the beach an elderly couple. The day was extremely hot, and the old gentleman had removed his hat for a moment to give his head the benefit of a little fresh air. His head was, I should think, the baldest ever issued. The rays of the sun glanced on it till it shone like a silver-plated dish-cover. The moment I caught sight of that head, I knew why I had been carrying that quivering and diabolical monstrosity about with me. Would that its native ocean had washed it ashore a million miles away, or that the roaring billows had flung it up to the back of the moon! What did it want at Brighton? Why was it not born lame and blind, and altogether without ambition, content to dwell in a cellar at the bottom of the great deep,

with the lid on. Disgraced, and well-nigh ruined! Was ever such a thing heard of before — a live immortal man, spoiled by a wabbling absurdity of that description? But there, this is mere raving; no more of it.

“I balanced the hideous monster in the air.

“I turned him right side up, or right side down, I know not which, for my knowledge of his anatomy is limited.

“I took accurate aim, and then I let him drop.

“In another moment the creature landed on the venerable head below. With a yell of terror, for doubtless he thought the wall behind him had given way, the old gentleman shot the monster into the lap of his wife, and sprang to his feet.

He looked up and saw me before I could escape. In a towering passion he cried: “You villain! I’ll pay you for this!”

“Had a spark of valour remained in my breast, I should have had the courtesy to remain long enough to mention that I made no charge, and that he therefore need not trouble about payment; but in all haste I departed before a

policeman came on the scene ; and long before the old gentleman climbed up to the esplanade, I was invisible there."

"Then you did escape?" said Towker.

"Wait!" was the reply. "Wait! I almost wept as I thought of the terrible power these impulses had over me. If a man had handed me that jelly-fish on the beach, and said: 'Sir, I will give you five pounds to go up on to the esplanade and drop this creature on to yonder gentleman's head,' I should have scorned to make the contract; but the impulse coming as it did, the jelly-fish here, the bald head there, a lightning flash of thought as to the fitness of things generally, and lo! the deed was done.

"That very autumn I joined a choral society, and among the lady singers was one who greatly interested me. I obtained an introduction, and after an acquaintanceship of a few short weeks, was delighted to find she was so far attached to me, that, when I expressed a desire to become her acknowledged lover, she blushed and smiled.

"Towker, my boy," continued Mr. Fielder, "when the poet said: 'There's nothing half so sweet in life as Love's young dream,' he was

right. I was exceedingly happy, so crowded with bliss in fact, that there seemed to be no room for an evil and malignant temptation to find a home within my breast. Did you marry your first love, Mr. Towker?"

"No, I did not," replied James rather shortly, for it reminded him of his captivity; "but go on."

"Of course," resumed Fielder, "it was necessary for me to be introduced to the parents of my lady-love, and I was asked home to tea. I remember that Sunday well. It is photographed on my memory; nay, it is burned there as with a flat iron heated seven times hotter than usual. It was a fine day, and I had a new hat on. The last two items do not necessarily go arm-in-arm, but I mention them to show how every fact impressed itself on my memory."

"I suppose that was because you were so happy," said Mr. Towker.

"Not necessarily," replied Fielder musingly, "for as you will hear, the happiness did not last long, and yet after events on the same day, or some of them, are just as vividly impressed on my brain."

"I was ushered by the servant into the drawing-room, where awaiting my coming, sat my lady-love and her parents.

"I bowed and paused—the old gentleman rose and paused. We gazed upon each other for a second or two wonderingly; then, in a moment, like a thousand claps of thunder rolled into one, the truth broke on us both.

"‘By all that’s wicked,’" roared the old man, seizing the poker, "'tis that diabolical jelly-fish!"

"I did not wait to explain. I seldom do on such occasions. It is frequently an easier task to depart. One bound secured me the hall. I dashed open the street-door and flew down the steps with the old gentleman after me in full cry; and the one I adored had the pleasure of seeing the one she loved pursued round three sides of a square, hatless, frantic, gasping, by her own father, armed with the family poker. Naturally I escaped, being both younger and lighter; but the old gentleman ran well, I must confess."

"Did you lose the lady then?" inquired Towker.

"No," replied Fielder. "Had I been less

deeply smitten I should have given up hopes of seeing her again, but I felt that whatever came I could not abandon her. My life, my all was in her love. I felt I could face——”

“Anything but that poker,” suggested Towker.

Fielder looked a little disconcerted, but eventually said: “Yes; anything but that. However, a few more words will show you my present position. Suffice it to say that we are still engaged. I contrived a meeting, and my darling Jane told me that her father was furious, and threatened vengeance. He commanded her to break off the engagement, and she, being naturally frightened, promised to obey the command. With me, however, the fear of her father vanished, and she determined to be true. For six months I did not visit the house; then I turned up as a new sweetheart. Formerly I was Mr. Fielder, with a tendency to black frock coats and tall hats; now I am Mr. Brown, with cut-away coats and bowler or wideawake hats. As Mr. Fielder I had rather long hair and a considerable beard and moustache; Mr. Brown has his hair cut close to his head, and is clean shaven. Mr. Fielder

wore no spectacles; Mr. Brown does when he goes a-courting. Mr. Fielder had naturally a slight stoop, but six months' practice with the Indian clubs set him as straight as a grenadier. Formerly I sang songs and duets with my beloved, now I positively don't know a note of music, and Jane has to sing alone."

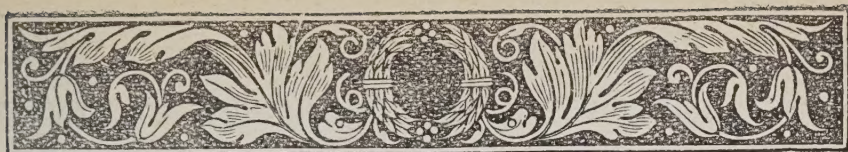
"And do you think the old gentleman never suspects you of launching the jelly-fish on to his head?" inquired Towker.

"I sometimes fancy he looks at me a little curiously," replied Fielder, "and I fancy he has tried to pump me; but as Mr. Zephaniah Brown has never to his knowledge been to Brighton, the plot failed. No, my disguise is a success, but it must come out. When I am married, and the name of 'Fielder' stands in the book and on the certificate, disguise will be useless. Of course I shall before that have gained my prize—my wife; but what a nice paragraph to read: 'Desperate fracas between a bridegroom and his father-in-law in a church!' I sometimes feel right in despair over the matter."

"I suppose you could not keep the old gentleman away from the church?" inquired Towker.

Fielder gave a moody sigh as he replied: "‘Brown, my boy,’—this is how he goes on when we are by ourselves—‘Brown, my boy, Janey is our only child, and I shall be proud to be at the ceremony. I shall stand the breakfast, Brown, and the carriages; for I like you, and I believe you to be a true and honest fellow. Give us your hand, Brown, my boy.’ Oh, what an unfortunate villain I am!" and Mr. Fielder ended with a dismal groan. "Can you suggest anything?" he inquired presently of Towker.

Mr. Towker declared himself unable to suggest anything at that particular moment, but promised to give the matter full consideration and to think it over. He could not help sighing, for he felt that he was in as false a position, with respect to his own wife and Mr. Jubb, as Fielder was, considered in his relation to Mr. Butterbank, the man upon whose bald head the victim to sudden impulses had dropped a jelly-fish.



CHAPTER XIV.

The trial of the victim to sudden impulses—"Guilty! but recommended to mercy." Affecting tableau.

MR. TOWKER liking Fielder, determined to do his utmost to make things happier for that gentleman, and thinking that he might obtain useful advice, took counsel on various occasions with Mr. Tolliger and one or two others. During their deliberations, more than one scheme was proposed and rejected, but at length they hit on one which was eventually carried out. Everybody was in the secret, but old Mr. Butterbank. That gentleman was to be introduced to "The White Owl" folks by Fielder, and brought in on

two or three occasions till he knew most of the regular customers. Mr. Fielder's name was not to be mentioned till the correct time arrived. There were two or three rehearsals of what was to be said and done, and eventually the proper evening came round.

About nine o'clock on this particular evening, the coffee-room at "The White Owl" contained some half-score persons. Among others present were Towker, Jubb, Tolliger, Corner, Gloster, Pommer, and Pownall. There was also a Mr. Gumbold, generally pronounced Gumboil.

Shortly after nine, old Mr. Butterbank entered, accompanied by Fielder, *alias* Zephaniah Brown. Greetings were exchanged, and Mr. Fielder ordered in some refreshment for Mr. Butterbank and himself. The conversation then, apparently accidentally, turned upon practical joking, but nothing came of that; then it wandered, without the slightest appearance of any one having a string round its neck, to sea-side resorts; this proving futile, it turned its attention to fish and fishing, embracing both fresh and salt water, and dragging in adventures with sharks and devil-fish. The

bait took somewhere about here, for Mr. Butterbank suddenly exclaimed :

“I had rather an unpleasant adventure with a jelly-fish once.”

He was entreated to tell it, and yielding to pressure, proceeded to relate the circumstance, getting very much excited over the matter—so excited over it, in fact, that he did not notice that Mr. Zephaniah Brown, under some pretence or another, had quitted the room. When he had concluded, Mr. Jubb said :

“’Twas a singular circumstance that this rascal should afterwards turn up in the shape of a suitor for the hand of your daughter.”

“Ah, I very soon settled that,” laughed the old gentleman. “I gave Master Fielder such a precious scare with that poker, that I expect he was quite willing for the engagement to be broken off.”

“What was the name of the young fellow?” inquired Mr. Jurdon, with some little anxiety.

“Fielder, Mr. Fielder,” replied Mr. Butterbank. “Do you happen to know a person of that name?”

The company looked at each other with

countenances expressive of the utmost astonishment, but for a moment or two no one spoke; then Towker said: "Very singular, sir, but are you not in company with a Mr. Fielder this evening?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Butterbank, "my young friend is Mr. Brown—Zephaniah Brown."

"I always understood his name was Fielder," came as a chorus from the company.

"Im—possible!" gasped the old gentleman.

"Well, I don't know," remarked Mr. Corner, slowly and thoughtfully, looking up at the gas globe and stroking his chin, "curious things are constantly happening, and a comparison of notes sometimes will make the comparers stare. Here is a curious circumstance, and I can vouch for it. A friend of mine fell in love with a young lady from France, French in fact, and after awhile married her. Years afterwards, in talking of the old folks, they found that each of their fathers had been in the battle of Waterloo, as foes of course; there is not much in the incident, but what there is you can take. Now I am positive your friend has never been known here by any other name than Fielder, and I am also

positive that on one occasion I heard him say, when I happened to be praising Brighton as a watering-place, 'Brighton be hanged, sir, I hate the name of it. Two things, sir,' he went on, 'never mention to me, if you do not desire to see me get into a passion. One is Brighton, and the other is a jelly-fish!' I tried hard to get him to say more, but he would not; now put this and that together, his assumed name, his hatred of Brighton and jelly-fish, what can it mean? His prolonged absence at this particular time, too, seems to point to the fact of his guilt."

Mr. Butterbank sat astounded. He called to mind that he *had* been suspicious of Zephaniah, and this was not an unimportant item. The deception, in which of course his daughter was a co-conspirator with Fielder, seemed to him so atrocious that he could hardly believe it. He sat and gasped.

Here the door opened quietly, and Zephaniah Brown entered amid dead silence. This looked ominous. The air seemed full of uneasiness, and the jelly-fishmonger seemed to feel the breath of a coming catastrophe; for he, instead of returning to his old seat, took another

which placed a table and two or three solid men between himself and his lady-love's father.

This action seemed to quite satisfy Mr. Butterbank that he had been deceived. Unable to control his fury, he sprang to his feet and yelled: "Mr. Brown! Mr. Fielder! Mr. Jellyfish! Mr. Infernal Impostor! I've found you out!" The look of conscious guilt on the face of Fielder told the old gentleman he was right, and without more ado he would have attacked Mr. Fielder with his umbrella had not several of the company held him back. How the old gentleman did gasp, and struggle, and groan! But it was all to no purpose, for strong hands held him under control.

"Let me entreat you to be calm, sir," said Mr. Gumbold. "As to you, sir," and he gave a look at Fielder that probably would have withered him, had it come unexpectedly, "it is not out of any feelings of mistaken compassion that we restrain this much-injured gentleman from taking summary and just vengeance upon your worthless carcase, but we cannot have this room, the scene of so

much harmony and peace, disturbed by a brawl."

"I never knew a worse case," said Mr. Jurdon solemnly.

"Such hideous complications and ramifications of criminality are seldom found in combination," said Mr. Corner.

"Idiotic cruelty, and accursed deception," murmured Mr. Pommer.

Fielder said nothing, but sat with downcast eyes, like a criminal awaiting the executioner, and looking as if he would not be sorry when the end came.

"This is a matter in which we are all more or less personally interested," said Mr. Jubb; "but it seems to me that as things at present stand, we are making no advance. Mr. Fielder has not spoken. Certainly appearances are against him, but, as yet, there has been no confession of guilt from his lips."

"Let the wretch speak!" cried Mr. Butterbank.

"I am guilty," sobbed the wretch; "but oh, sir" (this was to Butterbank), "oh, sir, if you knew what I have suffered over the matter, your desire for vengeance would be

appeased; I am sure it would. My foolish act, my wicked act, I should say, at Brighton, and my dreadful deception since, have, at times, tempted me to make away with myself. I assure you, gentlemen, that nothing but my deep love for this gentleman's daughter has saved me from suicide. For Mr. Butterbank himself I feel love, esteem, and reverence. If lifelong contrition can wipe out my crimes I am ready to show it. Gentlemen, I beseech you, try and prevail upon Mr. Butterbank to have some mercy. You are good men and sensible men, discuss the matter here; call me what you like, impose any punishment you like on me; but do not let him cast me forth unforgiven and broken-hearted. By the days when you were young and full of mischief, by the days when you were young and full of love, I conjure you to move him to compassion."

"I should propose that we hear all that Mr. Fielder can say in mitigation of his offence, and I should move that Mr. Gumbold do take the chair," said Mr. Gloster, rising to his feet.

This being seconded, Mr. Butterbank sullenly assenting, Mr. Gumbold took the chair and com-

menced proceedings by asking Mr. Fielder to tell the story of the jelly-fish—Mr. Butterbank's version having already been heard.

Then Mr. Fielder got on his feet and narrated the story, besides narrating some of the incidents he had mentioned to Towker. His defence, if defence it could be called, being his old plea of inability to resist these sudden impulses. Then he sat down.

"The question before us," began the chairman as judge, "is not a question of the guilt or innocence of the defendant, Fielder. That question has already, so far as we can see, been decided by the plea of 'Guilty' put forward by that unfortunate individual. I think I have a right to make use of the word 'unfortunate,' and I will tell you why. We have had a great many incidents in his career laid before us, and each of these incidents goes part of the way to show that there is a moral infirmity in the man which places him in the position of a being demanding our sympathy, rather than our resentment.

"I will not go so far as to say that the inability to resist temptation constitutes irresponsibility; but I will say that individuals

do often get into harm and mischief unwillingly through being heavily handicapped by Dame Nature. I will give you an example: A child, on the road home from school, steps into a dirty puddle which he had not observed through holding his head too high. I ask you, Is he to blame for stepping into that puddle, the existence of which he was ignorant of? You say 'No'; he is to blame for holding his head so high. My reply to that is this. He was holding his head at that particular angle through wearing a very high and stiff collar. Now was he to blame for holding his head so high? 'No!' you cry; he was to blame for wearing such a high and stiff collar. What will be your reply when I tell you that his mother fastened that collar round his neck with her own hands? You must acquit the child of blame.

"The illustration I have given is not particularly applicable to the case before us, except in one point. The child says to its mother: 'I did step in the puddle, but I could not help it.' The prisoner—I beg his pardon—the defendant says: 'I did drop the jelly-fish, but I could not help it.' Illustra-

tions are seldom perfect, and you can easily see the imperfection here. There is an element of temptation in Mr. Fielder's case that is absent from the other, but I believe you all apprehend how much of the illustration I use. Up to now we have arrived at this point: the defendant confesses to the act, but asks to have an extenuating circumstance thrown into the other scale, by pleading that he was totally unable to prevent himself doing what he did. I had no idea when I started of making so many preliminary remarks. These remarks have made me dry, and if some one will ring the bell, after the waiter has given us what we require, the Court is open for any one to address it—either by way of claiming mercy or punishment for the gentleman whose case is now under consideration.”

“I claim the Court's indulgence for a moment,” said Mr. Fielder, rising to his feet, and addressing the judge. “May I speak, sir?”

The judge gave a solemn wink and replied: “It is not a usual thing to allow a person upon trial to make an oration, especially at such an early stage of the proceedings; but

the rules of this particular Court are not very stringent, and I think you may."

"I merely wished to say," said Fielder, "that, as this Court is sitting at my request, and with a view to help me, I should like to be allowed to pay for the drinks now desired."

"This, sir, is rank bribery," shouted old Mr. Butterbank, as he rose to his feet, "and ought not to be allowed!"

"Permit me to remark," said the judge, "that your conduct at this moment makes me more than ever inclined to believe Mr. Fielder when he states that these impulses that so constantly get him into trouble are irresistible. You, sir, are a living witness to the truth of this, for nothing less than a sudden and irresistible impulse could have made you give utterance to the words you have just used. See what you have done. Firstly, you have been guilty of contempt of Court; secondly, you have accused Mr. Fielder of attempting to bribe us; and thirdly, you have insinuated that these honest men about you, are, in the language of vulgar people, to be 'got at' for a paltry drink."

Mr. Butterbank expressed sorrow for his sudden and disturbing remark, and the waiter having been summoned into the room, the various members of the Court gave their orders, which were speedily attended to.

Clinking of glasses and drinking of healths now took place for a few minutes, and Jurdon confidentially informed those interested in the matter that he had heard Mumley was about again, and vowing vengeance against the removers of his ten-year-old whisky.

Some laughed, and some looked a little uneasy ; but here the judge rapped loudly with his hammer, and announced the Court open to all orators.

Mr. Josh. Jurdon rose at once, and said :
“ Mr. Judge and gentlemen, the remarks we have listened to are good, sound to the core, and worthy of the speaker. I don't profess to be much of a lawyer, but that word responsibility made me think. There is no act committed by a sane man, to my thinking, but what he or some one else is responsible for. If Mr. Fielder says he is not responsible, I ask who is ? Are we ? Or is Mr. Butterbank ? Or are the responsible parties gone abroad, and

left no address? There is no getting away from the fact that every man has his bundle of responsibilities tied to his back. These are of a certain size and a certain weight, and each man must carry his own. No hand-barrows are allowed, and you can't pop them into the post-office without a stamp on, unaddressed, and so get them stowed away in the dead-letter office.

"In one way, gentlemen like Mr. Fielder do increase our responsibilities, for careful people must be ever on the watch to keep out of the way of such impulsive creatures. Now, having to a certain extent shown that Mr. Fielder has increased our responsibilities, I think we can fairly ask him to take the burden of other responsibilities, or perhaps I should say, responsibilities of another class. The immediate responsibilities now developed, I should suggest, may take the form of cigars, as our glasses have been so recently charged."

Mr. Jurdon sat down, and Mr. Fielder ordered in a dozen cigars, and showed his willingness to submit to his new class of responsibilities by paying for them without a murmur. When some of these cigars were well alight,

Jurdon continued : "The cheerfulness with which the jelly-fish demonstrator has accepted his new responsibilities, and the fact that the outraged complainant is now sharing in the defendant's new responsibilities by smoking one of the recently arrived cigars, leads me to believe that a reconciliation will take place before the Court closes. It must take place"—here Jurdon raised his voice—"if we stay here a week to effect it, during which time, Mr. Fielder, your new class of responsibilities will continue."

Mr. Fielder winced a little, but smiled nevertheless ; for old Mr. Butterbank, under the beneficent influence of a mild cigar, was looking quite benevolent.

When Jurdon sat down, Mr. Peter Huddle, a commercial traveller, rose, and asked permission of the judge to put a few questions to the defendant.

The judge having given his consent, Peter, assuming a tone and look of great solemnity, observed : "I think a great deal depends on the size of the object cast by the defendant on to the complainant's head. I, therefore, beg to ask Mr. Fielder : 'What was the size of the jelly-fish ?'"

"I should say," replied Fielder, "about the size of a large oyster."

"That's false!" yelled Mr. Butterbank. "It was nearer the size of a ten-pound goose."

The judge shook his head severely at Mr. Butterbank and said: "Really, sir; really, sir; really, sir!" And Mr. Butterbank subsided.

"There is a considerable difference in size between an oyster and a goose," said Mr. Huddle, "and it seems extremely probable to me that this jelly-fish was somewhere between the two sizes. I should have liked to have its exact dimensions, but do not expect to now be able to obtain them, so long a time having elapsed since the catastrophe took place. I can quite see in my own mind that there would be an apparent difference in size, in the minds of the two individuals concerned, even without prejudice. The deliverer of the article lets it drop, and in its receding it seems to grow less every foot it falls; had the distance been greater it would have appeared when it reached its destination no larger than a small oyster. On the other hand, the receiver comes into possession of an article, which

starting from a considerable height, falls with tenfold force on his unprotected head. The next moment it is exhibited to his view. The sense of sight is somewhat biassed by the sense of feeling, which had the moment before reported that an unknown something of prodigious weight had fallen by accident, or been cast by design upon his brain-case. Thus you see, gentlemen, that neither defendant nor complainant were at the supreme moment in a state of mind to judge of the exact dimensions of the jelly-fish."

"May I ask one question?" nervously inquired Mr. Butterbank.

"Yes," replied the judge, rather shortly.

"What has the size of the object to do with the matter?" said Mr. Butterbank to Mr. Peter Huddle.

"A great deal," replied the solemn Peter. "If it were small, and young and found lonely on the sands, why should not Mr. Fielder moved by compassion have picked it up with the intention of adopting it? He declares he is ignorant of the reason why he picked it up, but common sense and science show us that we do things every day with-

out apparent sufficient cause, the reason of our behaviour not dawning on us till afterwards. Allow me for one moment to presume that the jelly-fish was young and small, and that Mr. Fielder did pick it up with the intention of adopting it, his further action is then easily explained. Who can gaze upon our worthy friend, Mr. Butterbank, without being impressed with the large amount of humanity discernible in his countenance? 'Tis a countenance literally washed in the milk of human kindness. As a student of physiognomy and phrenology from my infancy, for I cut my teeth on an old copy of Lavater, while my only plaything was a phrenological head made of earthenware, I assure you, my lord judge and you gentlemen, that no face I have ever studied, nor any head I have ever examined, was more pleasing to the sight and touch than the face and head of Mr. Butterbank."

A loud murmur of applause, quickly suppressed by the judge, followed Mr. Huddle's remarks, and Mr. Butterbank blushed to the hue of a tomato. He however did not look displeased.

Mr. Huddle continued: "Granting that our friend the defendant was moved to feelings of compassion at the sight of this deserted waif of the ocean, and did pick it up with full purposes of adoption, can you not see now why he came to hand it over to the complainant? Here was a young man pledged to a deed of mercy, and having started, he did not like to go back. Yet, with the understanding of his responsibilities, there dawned on him a fear that he might be unable to carry out his object. He was a single young man, possibly in furnished lodgings. Where was the nursery for the little creature to play in? Where was the servant to take it out for an airing? The landlady would object to have it wading about on the sofa, and 'twould be an act of cruelty to keep it in a hat-box, or even in a cupboard. He felt that he had committed himself to an awkward course of conduct, and at that moment he discovered Mr. Butterbank *with his hat off*. This may seem a matter of little importance, but the hat being off and no growth of hair intervening, the organ of 'benevolence' rose up grandly in the sun like a little hillock, and this decided

the matter. Here was a man of vast benevolence with probably a family and nursery at home. Here was home for the little orphan, and so down went a present from Brighton. Such is my theory, supposing the jelly-fish was young, small, and tender. If, on the contrary, it was aged, large, and leathery, then, gentlemen, I grieve to say it—but I must—I can find no excuse; but”—and here Peter assumed a tone of tragic intensity—“feel it is my duty to proclaim that the defendant is a villain steeped in crime from his apex to his toe-nails. An unprincipled poltroon, who only quits performing the most enormous atrocities to indulge in the most atrocious enormities; a creature whose heart is a sink of iniquity, and whose brain is gorged to blackness with sinister and diabolical suggestions.”

Mr. Fielder winced perceptibly; but Huddle, raising his voice, cried: “Such a person as I have endeavoured to describe must show it in face and body, and I have only to ask this one question,” and he pointed to Fielder, “Does he look like it?”

A yell of “No; No!” despite the frowns

of the judge, brought a smile to the face of Peter, and Fielder looked quite pleased again.

Mr. Corner, one of the individuals, it will be remembered, who persuaded Pommer that he was a murderer, rose to his feet, and addressing the assembly, said: "I fully agree with the last speaker, but I am persuaded that the jelly-fish was a middle-aged one, and therefore I cannot go as far either way as Mr. Huddle. I simply claim it as a brutal and unnecessary assault. What are the facts of the case? We have a young man holiday-making, and freed from labour for a time. How ought he to feel? Jubilant and grateful! His soul should be full of poetry. Before him rolls the glorious sea, over him is the ethereal blue, and about him the warm sunshine from heaven making the earth glad. All cares and shadows should fade from him; innocence and placid benevolence should fill his heart.

"Was such the case? No! Wandering along, his eyes rest on a picture that should inspire him with reverence—peaceful age calmly enjoying the summer sun. What does the

fiend-like youth do? Straightway hurls upon peaceful age's unprotected head a monster of the deep. The action is so utterly inconsistent with its surroundings that if it had not been followed by cowardly flight I should be inclined to put it down to sunstroke.

"The only thing I can see is to appeal to those nobler and higher feelings which are on special occasions evoked from the breast of the individual. What is higher and nobler than revenge? Forgiveness! By revenge we lower ourselves, and in nine cases out of ten our victim with us. By forgiveness we raise ourselves to a higher standard, and in most cases we raise the forgiven one with us.

"If Mr. Butterbank would secure a friend for life, let him forgive Mr. Fielder. Understand, I do not defend the defendant's act. I view that with horror. I do not plead for the man for himself, for he has aggravated his act of brutality by his prolonged deception since. Even in that, however, I can see further reason for pressing my plea for mercy: he must have been tortured by remorse and incessantly haunted by disagreeable fears. Let Mr. Butterbank remember the words of the

poet, 'Mercy is twice blessed, it blesseth him that gives and him that takes.'"

Several others made speeches, but all of them denounced Fielder as a wretch, in accordance with pre-arrangements. Jubb and Towker both said a few words, and then Mr. Pommer rose.

"I am no orator," said that worthy, "and I say at once that I view the descent of the jelly-fish as a very stupid practical joke, and one that might have been attended with more serious results than it—it was attended with. You will excuse me alluding to a delicate part of the affair, that is, the affection existing between Mr. Fielder and Miss Butterbank. I must implore the complainant to be forgiving for the sake of that young lady, and not to allow a sacred engagement to be broken off by a jelly-fish.

"I personally have known seven cases where stern fathers have forbidden their daughters to marry the objects of their affection, and in each case this action of the parents has been attended with disastrous results. I will relate them without comment, and as briefly as possible.

"*No. 1.*—In this case the poor girl died of a broken heart, and the father went out of his mind."

Mr. Butterbank started.

"*No. 2.*—The daughter refused to comply with her father's wishes, and eloped with the man of her choice. Parent and child never met again."

Mr. Butterbank scratched his head.

"*No. 3.*—The daughter complied with her father's wish, and lived single in his house; but for seventeen years she never spoke to him."

Mr. Butterbank sighed.

"*No. 4.*—In this case the daughter gradually gave way to melancholia, and eventually poisoned herself by boiling down one of her lover's old meerschaum pipes, and drinking the soup."

Mr. Butterbank blew his nose.

"*No. 5.*—The daughter took to drinking, and eventually died in a hospital for dipsomaniacs."

Mr. Butterbank shuddered.

"*No. 6.*—Daughter retired into a nunnery."

Mr. Butterbank bit his lip.

No. 7.—The daughter complied with her father's command, but got so mad afterwards that she eloped with a chimney-sweep fifty-four years of age."

Mr. Butterbank gave a great groan, then rose and said with emotion: "Gentlemen, you have beaten me; I'll forgive the rascal. Here!" And he held out his hand, which Fielder took, with tears in his eyes.

It really was an affecting moment, but the pathos was not allowed to last, for Jurdon, slapping Mr. Butterbank on the shoulder, lifted up his voice and sang the first line of the immortal production of an unknown bard—"For he's a jolly good fellow." The chorus was taken up in a way that showed the assembly meant every syllable of the song, and every note of the music, and so happily ended the trial of Mr. Fielder.





CHAPTER XV.

Mr. Tolliger being placed in heartbreaking circumstances, confides in Mr. Towker, and obtains a promise of assistance in the hour of need. Tricks of Jailer Jubb.

MR. TOWKER was greatly pleased at the success of his endeavours to bring joy to the heart of Fielder. It must be confessed that he felt rather nervous during the proceedings at "The White Owl," lest Mr. Butterbank should, in vulgar parlance, "smell a rat." Had he done so, in all probability Mr. Fielder would have had to give up all thoughts of his lady-love. This was the fear that kept Towker on thorns during the trial, but when it was over, and the reconciliation was, as it were, sealed with music, he felt proud.

On Saturday afternoons James generally arrived home as early as two o'clock. On the second Saturday following the trial of Fielder, on his arrival home his wife said: "Oh, James, Mr. Tolliger wants to see you as soon after dinner as you can make it convenient to spare him a few minutes."

"Right, my dear," said Towker, cheerily; "I'll pop up directly the meal is over."

"I think he said something about having to leave home in a hurry; but baby was rather troublesome, so I did not quite catch his words."

To this Mr. Towker made a suitable reply, and, as soon as the meal was over, lit his pipe and walked up stairs.

He found Tolliger busily engaged in packing away various articles of attire in his portmanteau, and after exchanging greetings said: "Off, I see."

"Yes," groaned Tolliger, as he gave the portmanteau a spiteful kick and motioned Towker to take a chair, while he dropped wearily into another.

"Ah, my boy!" he then exclaimed with a deep sigh, "I'm in trouble."

Mr. Towker began to wonder if Tolliger was another victim to sudden impulses, and fidgeted a bit as he thought of being permanently engaged as a setter-to-rights of other men's troubles.

"Mr. Towker," said the unhappy youth as he wagged his head dolefully, and all unconsciously set his ears flapping about, "you recently honoured me by a confession concerning your unhappy position in this house."

"I did," sighed Towker.

"You did," sighed Tolliger. Then he continued: "You had my sympathy."

"I did," said Towker.

"You did," sobbed Tolliger.

"Well," he went on restraining his emotion, "I am now about to show a return of confidence in you, and also to beg of you to help me."

"As I helped Mr. Fielder?" asked Towker with a smile.

"This is worse than the jelly-fish arrangement," replied Mr. Tolliger; "but you can help me if you will."

"Then I will," cried James earnestly, "I certainly will if it lies in my power."

Mr. Tolliger, deeply moved, grasped his friend and fellow-lodger by the hand warmly. He then filled his pipe from his fellow-sufferer's pouch and commenced his narration.

“You must know, Mr. Towker, that I am deeply in love with one who, in my eyes, is the fairest and most amiable girl in creation. Our affection, I may say, is mutual, and in that mutual affection we are extremely happy. There is one bar to our happiness, however, in the person of Julia's aunt, Julia being the name of my beloved, and another bar in the person of my own uncle. Julia, I may tell you, was left without father or mother in her infancy, and adopted by her uncle and aunt. Her uncle died some ten years ago, so the niece and aunt live together now in almost the relation of mother and daughter. Julia is naturally very much attached to her aunt, and I honestly believe her aunt is very much attached to her. The aunt however objects to me, partly because she considers Julia is too young to be engaged, and partly because, from what Julia has told her of my position, she does not consider me good enough for her niece. I know nothing of the aunt person-

ally, as she declines to grant me an interview ; but when I last saw my darling—we are compelled to keep our meetings secret—she assured me that her aunt was as inexorable as ever.”

“You also spoke of your uncle standing in the way of your happiness,” said Mr. Towker.

“Yes, and I will explain how that is,” replied the youth with the ears. “I have neither father nor mother. My father and mother both died when I was young, and I was adopted by my uncle and aunt. In fact, my position is somewhat similar to Julia’s, except that my aunt instead of my uncle departed this life some few years ago. Now my uncle having brought me up from infancy, I of course feel a considerable affection for him ; and as he has promised to make me his heir, the affection is increased. Well, to cut matters short, he has got wind of my love affair, and in his usual curt style told me I must drop that, or he’d drop me. Which is as good as saying that he’ll dismiss me from his employment, and cut me off, not with, but without the customary shilling. Oh, I don’t know what to do !” fairly groaned Tolliger.

Towker waited. He half feared the task to be set him was to seize the bodies of these pugnacious destroyers of Tolliger's happiness, and, by fair means or foul, induce them to consent to Tolliger's union with the lovely and disconsolate Julia.

Mr. Tolliger having re-lit his pipe, which had gone out during his speech, now started afresh.

"Only three nights ago," said that unhappy young man, "I contrived to meet my Julia at the gate at the end of her aunt's garden. I kissed away her dewy tears, for the sight of her unhappiness maddened me. All thoughts of prudence left me, and I entreated the lovely being to consent to an elopement."

"Did the young lady consent?" anxiously inquired the breathless Towker.

"She did eventually," replied Mr. Tolliger; "but only after I threatened to cut my throat if she refused."

"But you never meant to do it!" cried Towker, horrified.

"Well," said the other gloomily, "I don't suppose I should have got far if I had started; but I felt like doing it when I made the threat."

“But if you have made up your mind to get married despite your opponents, why these sighs?” inquired Mr. Towker. “I see even now you are preparing for flight.”

Tolliger shook his weary head again. “Listen!” said he. “All our preparations were discussed that evening. Everything was settled on. The back gate was to be left open. The gardener’s ladder in the shed would reach to her window and serve for descent, for she dare not venture downstairs in the usual way, for fear of waking her aunt, who sleeps in the front of the house, and is a very light sleeper. A cab was to be waiting to drive us to London, where an old friend and his wife were willing to give shelter to Julia till I got the license and the marriage could be solemnised; and now that is all upset;” and the youth, in his extreme agitation, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and once more made an attack on Towker’s pouch.

“Have the old folks got wind of the matter, or has the young lady drawn back?” inquired Towker.

“No,” replied Tolliger; “simply a matter of horrible business. When I went to the

office this morning, my uncle—he's a solicitor, you must know—said: 'Oh, I want you to go on a journey—to Liverpool first, and possibly to Scotland afterwards. The matter is of considerable importance, and you must go down by the first train you can catch. Go at once to "The Goat Hotel," and inquire for a Mr. Robert Dulsem Palmer; if he is not there, take up your abode at the hotel and wait till he inquires for you. He will give you all necessary instructions, and you will write or wire me according to the necessities of the case. This will do to begin with'—and he handed me twenty pounds; so that it is evident he does not expect to see me back for some little time."

"And you must go to-day?" mused Towker.

"Bound to," replied Tolliger. "What excuse could I invent to remain here? I should only put him out of temper, and possibly excite his suspicions; besides, if I stayed here, I could not obtain an interview with Julia, for we agreed to meet no more till the eventful night arrived, with the direct purpose of making the old lady suspect nothing; and

now, my poor confiding innocent will be ready at the appointed time and find no lover, no ladder, no cab, no explanation, no nothing!" Groans finished the sentence.

"Cannot you write to your betrothed?" inquired Towker. "At the worst it is only delaying the momentous event."

"I daren't write!" cried Tolliger. "Julia has expressly forbidden me to write to her, as her aunt—suspicious old cat!—opens all her letters."

"It certainly is awkward," said James, sympathetically.

"Awkward! It's horrible!" moaned Tolliger. "I can only get out of it with assistance, and I want you to help me."

"How?" inquired Mr. Towker.

"Here," said Mr. Tolliger, displaying an envelope that evidently contained a note, "is a letter I have written to Julia; and what I want you to do is this: On the night, which is noted in this corner of the envelope, go to the house—here is the address on the front of the envelope—then all you will have to do is to go into the garden by the way

of the back gate. On the left hand is the gardener's shed; just inside you will find a ladder; take that ladder and place it against the window marked on this sketch; you cannot make a mistake. Tap gently three times on the glass, and Julia will open the window. Place this letter in her hand and simply say: 'From Mr. Tolliger.' Then you can descend, and don't forget to replace the ladder in the shed. You will do this much for a broken-hearted man, will you not?" And Tolliger seized hold of Mr. Towker's hand and wrung it convulsively.

James hesitated. It was a situation that took some little time to grasp in its entirety. He had no desire to figure in the police-court as a suspicious character found on enclosed premises with the evident intention of committing a burglary. In a half-hearted way he hinted as much to Tolliger, who at once said:

"There is no danger of that occurring. The garden is full of shrubs and trees so that no one can possibly see you from the road. As to the policemen, you as well as myself

know every one of them about here. You see the address, it is not more than ten minutes' walk from this place."

Rather against his inclination, but moved by Tolliger's unhappy situation, James eventually consented to turn himself into a midnight letter-carrier, and at once concealed the precious missive in his breast-pocket.

Mr. Tolliger was profuse in his thanks—and by way of showing that his own sorrows could not make him forget those of others, he questioned Towker as to how he was getting on with Mrs. Jubb.

Towker had little to communicate. Things were going on much the same as before. Mrs. Jubb displayed all the petty malignity that she dared do without attracting the notice of any other than her victim. Thus, as soon as Mr. Towker's baby could hold anything in its little hand, Mrs. Jubb presented it with a small whip, with verbal instructions, laughingly given in the presence of James and Isabel, to "whip its dear old daddy."

On another occasion she obtained possession of some newspaper article on "Dogs," and snipping out with her scissors such words as

suiting her purpose, she gummed them on a sheet of note paper and dropped it in Towker's path as she heard him coming downstairs one morning. Curiosity made the man pick it up, and then he read all in print, "dog, cur, mongrel, hound, pup, puppy, puppy-dog, whelp——"

As may be imagined, Towker dropped that paper as if it had been red-hot, and tried to make the back of his head and his ears look as if he had not seen, let alone read it; but he heard a horrible feminine chuckle as he went out at the open door and down the steps, and he knew, that she knew, that he knew what was printed on the half-sheet of note paper.

One other outrageous scheme Towker had quite frustrated. While talking one evening about naming the baby, his wife suggested that the little one should have, in addition to her mother's name Isabel, the further additional Christian name of "May," being short, sweet, and redolent of sunshine and scents. Towker was going to join in praising the name when, like an air of far-off days, there came ploughing through his brain pas-

tures, "May, May, Ethel May," and he almost said and quite thought a naughty word. Here was a diabolical scheme by "Jubb," late "May"—a scheme to everlastingly remind him of his present gaoler. Coughing down his emotion he simply said: "I think we will be content with one name, my dear. You have only one, and I have only one Christian name, so we'll call baby 'Isabel,' the dearest name in the world to me."

This pretty way of putting it, accompanied by an affectionate kiss, settled the matter. Mrs. Towker, who was quite ignorant of Mrs. Jubb's maiden name, simply saying as the conversation on that topic ended: "Ethel—Mrs. Jubb—thought it a nice name, and so did I."

This was all the information Mr. Towker could give to Tolliger, and that gentleman, after again expressing sympathy to the captive lodger, said: "Your hope lies here. Jubb is, I know, going to Yarmouth shortly; and he wants Mrs. Jubb to go with him. Then you can cut and chance it."

Towker simply sighed, and shortly afterwards Mr. Tolliger departed with his portmanteau to catch the train for Liverpool, feeling

a degree of relief almost amounting to comfort in the knowledge that Mr. Towker had promised to execute his commission, and knowing that he could trust him.

It is not given to us weak mortals to know all up to date, and this is frequently a wise provision. We often guide ourselves to a better ending of some particular matter, by knowing only part of the circumstances with which that particular matter is environed. We may term it accident if we please to do so. The name makes no difference; the fact remains the same.

Mr. Tolliger would most certainly not have sat himself so composedly down in the train to Liverpool, had he known as much as some of the other characters in his love affair knew. Nor would Mr. Towker have so calmly viewed the scene of his forthcoming operations by daylight, had he been better informed concerning the somewhat complicated structure of the projected elopement.

When Tolliger and his delightfully precious Julia had finished their arrangements for a speedy and foolish flight, our hero kissed and

stole away, while the lady speedily betook herself to the interior of the house.

Then, from behind a clump of bushes near the back gate, there emerged the form of old Dick, the gardener. Having had a little too much to drink during the day, he had decided on taking a nap before going home. Aroused by the sound of voices, he listened; and though he missed a word here, and a sentence there, the whole plot was revealed to him.

Having nobody else to confide in, as soon as all was quiet, he commenced to commune with himself. "Richard, Richard!" said he, "this is a sollum matter. Not for nothink was your bed among the rushes; it wor a special providence, an' no error. You must do your dooty like a man, Richard. 'Spose it was your gal as was goin' to helope down a ladder, in a cab, with sum scamp of a feller, all collar an' cuffs, an' no 'art, like a badly-growed lettis—woodn't you be hobligated to 'em if sumbody was to inform you of it? Yes; you must do your dooty. Miss Julia, there's a reckonin' for you; an' Mr. Tolliger, there's a reckonin' for you."

No surprise need be felt at the gardener recognising Tolliger. Old Dick knew nearly

every one round about the neighbourhood, and every man, woman, and child knew old Dick as well as they knew the village church.

The very next morning the gardener said to his mistress; "Morning, ma'm. I've summat to tell ye; but you must promise me not to take on too much about it."

The good lady stared but said nothing.

"Yes," continued old Dick, "it's summat perfectly houtrageous. Miss Julia is going to helope!"

"What!"

"Yes, mam. Helope down a ladder, this 'ere ladder of mine, mam, in a cab, mam, all arranged beautiful, mam."

Greatly agitated with mixed feelings of horror and indignation, the lady begged Richard to give her all the information he could.

Old Dick, proud of the sensation he had made, then told her all he knew, including the night and the time. The lady thanked and rewarded old Dick, and impressed upon him the necessity of not letting her niece become aware of the fact that they were in possession of her secret.

"Right, mam," replied Richard, placing his

finger on his lip; "and seein' as how I took a bit of a cold last night, if you could spare me to-day to go 'ome and nuss it, I should be obligated to you, mam."

Whether old Dick really wanted to nurse himself remains to be seen. Anyhow he got the holiday.

Tolliger's uncle was named Ephraim Tolliger; Tolliger the lover being son to Tolliger the solicitor's brother. Ephraim Tolliger till within some two years of the date of this story lived, and had offices not very far from "The White Owl." At the time mentioned ambition had moved him to London; his old house and offices being retained by his junior partner, with Tolliger to act as clerk. This explains why Mr. Tolliger was living in lodgings instead of with his uncle. The firm had the management too of certain estates, so that when a house was be let on one of these estates, a board was stuck in the front garden, inviting intending tenants to apply to "Tolliger and Co., No. —, High Street, X——; or No. —, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

There were generally two or three of these boards visible in different spots, and the first

place Old Dick took his cold to to nurse it was in front of one of these boards. Then he, still nursing his cold, took it to the Railway Station, and, probably with a view of trying the effect of change of air, bought a ticket and took his cold up to London. Eventually Old Dick and his cold found themselves in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and after boxing the compass and focussing topographical facts, brought up safely in Mr. Ephraim Tolliger's London office.

Tolliger, the man of law, when he heard the news pertaining to Tolliger the man of love, stormed at a fearful rate.

"The young fool!" he shouted; "to allow himself to be cajoled by a scheming girl. As to you, my honest friend, I thank you; you shall be rewarded. Let this go no further."

"Mum's the word," said Old Dick; "all I wanted was to do my dooty; now I'm satisfied."

"I'll stop it precious quick," said Mr. Ephraim sternly, as he handed Old Dick ten shillings, and bowed him out, after shaking him warmly by the hand, and thanking him again and again.

Mr. Ephraim was firmly convinced that his nephew was the victim to a designing girl, while Mrs. Gane, Julia's aunt, was just as firmly convinced that her niece was the victim of a designing youth. Arguing therefore from the same standpoint, it is no wonder that they arrived at the same conclusion, and that was this—a separation of the lovers would certainly spoil the elopement and might possibly break the engagement altogether.

Mr. Ephraim, saying nothing of what he knew, treacherously betrayed his nephew into the hands of the Liverpudlians on the Saturday before the elopement, which was fixed for the following Wednesday night, or, it should be written, Thursday morning.

Mrs. Gane wrote at once to a sister who lived at Brighton, begging her to come up without delay. This good lady came up breathless, and after two or three days' stay and several mysterious interviews with Mrs. Gane after her niece had retired, finally steamed back to Brighton on the very morning of the projected elopement, having in her company the dejected young lady thought so highly of by our young friend Tolliger.

Mrs. Gane had said nothing to her niece as to what she knew, but had expressed a desire in kind but firm tones that Julia should visit Brighton for a few weeks for the benefit of her health. So to Brighton she went.

One thing, however, should be well understood by all who feel strong enough to follow this simple and pathetic story to the end. Old Richard did not inform Mrs. Gane that the young man's uncle knew of the arrangement; nor did he inform Ephraim Tolliger that the young lady's aunt was aware of the plan which would bring into use the peculiar trio of ladder, cab, and license. So the hours passed, and the letter that lay in Towker's pocket exhibited signs of distress at its corners, and Tolliger in vain inquired at "The Goat Hotel," for "Mr. Robert Dulsem Palmer," and at length the eventful night arrived.





CHAPTER XVI.

Mr. Towker, as a letter-carrier, gets a deputy, and is not sorry for it afterwards. To the amazement of Towker, and also of the writer, everything turns out better than might have been expected.

MR. TOWKER had felt nervous on accepting Tolliger's commission, and the nearer the time came to execute it the feeling of nervousness increased. While doing his best for Mr. Fielder, he had felt ill at ease on the eventful evening. There, however, he had been supported by the presence of companions, gas-lights, and plenty of cheering beverages. Executing Tolliger's commission he would be alone, in darkness, in a strange garden, on a strange ladder, in the dead and awful hours of night. "Bother Tolliger," he groaned over

and over again. "I wish I'd never said 'Yes' to his proposition."

The night arrived, and Mr. Towker was on the spot, where we must leave him for a few moments trying to persuade his knees not to tremble so, while we whip up a few other particulars.

As Ephraim Tolliger and Mrs. Gane were perfect strangers to each other, it need not be wondered at that each remained in total ignorance of what the other had done towards spoiling the elopement. Ephraim knew that the plot, so far as it concerned his nephew, was spoiled, and chuckled accordingly; and Mrs. Gane knew that the plot, so far as it concerned the eloping of her niece, was spoiled, and rejoiced with a womanly chuckling. As yet, however, no terminus had been built.

The elder "he" concluded that the younger "she" would be at the window waiting to elope, while the elder "she" concluded that the younger "he" would be found creeping up the ladder at the time arranged. Accordingly the elder "she" concluded to await the arrival of the younger "he" and give him a bit of her mind; and just as accordingly the elder "he" concluded to go

at the time arranged and give a lecture on the wickedness of eloping to the younger "she." As has been said no terminus had been built, but it looks as if there was a probability of a junction presently.

Mr. Ephraim Tolliger drove down from London in a cab, and the noise of this cab passing the end of the quiet lane where the back-garden gate was situated, somewhat disturbed the mind of Mr. Towker, who had just heard the church clock strike "one," and made up his mind to deliver his letter or perish in the attempt.

The cab drove past the end of the lane, however, for some forty yards and then stopped; for, as Mr. Ephraim thought, "She'll be sure to hear it and will be waiting." She did hear it, and was waiting. Mr. Towker, hearing the cab pass, felt a little easier, for a sudden thought had struck him that possibly Tolliger had ordered the cab prematurely and forgotten to countermand the order.

Two or three minutes feeling about in the dark in the shed put James into possession of the ladder. It was only some twelve feet long, so that there was no difficulty in carrying

it under his arm. Towker, however, almost tumbled into little bits when he found himself confronted by a stout middle-aged gentleman the moment he emerged from the shed. This was Mr. Ephraim, who, the better to hide all noise, had come from town in his slippared feet. There was no great hardship in this, as he had come in a cab and meant returning in the same vehicle.

Mr. Ephraim Tolliger was as much astounded as Towker. For a moment he thought it was his own nephew, then he thought it must be Old Dick; but when he found a stranger carrying off the ladder, he hardly knew what to think. The thought of burglars struck him; but Towker's silk hat, gloved hands, and general appearance, put that suspicion to flight at once.

Anyway, here was a mystery to him, and a mystery to Towker till suddenly catching sight of the Tolliger ear, which ran in the family, he arrived at the correct conclusion that the gentleman before him was Tolliger's uncle. Towker saw clearly enough now that the planned elopement was known to the man of law; but what did he want there,

and at that hour? The thought was a little too romantic that, having got rid of his nephew, he meant himself to take his place and elope with the young lady.

Said Mr. Ephraim in a low tone, lest outsiders might hear: "I see, sir, you are surprised at my presence here; that I can and will explain. I am surprised to find you here; suppose you return the favour and give me an explanation. That seems fair to me, sir. How does it strike you?"

"Well," replied Towker, "it seems fair; but do you mind admitting I am right in looking upon you as my friend Tolliger's uncle?"

"You are perfectly right, sir," answered Ephraim; "and I will at once inform you that I know all about this—this—— Do you?"

"If you know all about it," said James, "then we are alike."

"I see I can speak with safety now. You, of course, refer to the—the——"

"Yes," replied Towker, who was loth to mention the word before his companion cared to.

"Tut, tut," said Tolliger senior; "we're wasting time. I have stopped the elopement, and my business here to-night is to—is to take my nephew's place on the ladder, with a view to reproving this young person in a fatherly but severe fashion. I thought at first of acquainting her aunt with the plot, but I am disposed to be lenient, sir, lenient. You can judge of my surprise when I find this particular ladder in your possession."

"I only require it for a moment or two," said Mr. Towker. "I have business with the young lady, I cannot deny it. My business concluded, I shall be happy to hand the ladder over to you, sir, if you will engage to replace it in the shed when you have done with it."

"Young man," said Mr. Ephraim, "beware of meddling in these serious matters! As guardian and uncle of my deluded nephew, I consider I have first right to the use of the ladder."

"Having arrived here first, and having obtained possession of the article in question," replied Mr. Towker, "I do not feel that you have a right to call on me to resign in favour of yourself."

"You abstain from looking at the question in a moral light, sir ; put it down, sir, I beseech you. Perhaps, sir, you have a wife ; ah, I see you wince. What would she say to your storming the castle of a young lady at this lone hour of the night. Indiscreet, sir ! your conduct is very indiscreet."

"I have no intention of storming a castle," said James, who wished himself safe at home. "When I tell you that I simply wish to deliver a note, you can guess that I shall not keep you waiting long."

Mr. Ephraim said solemnly : "Sir, I do assure you that this unlucky affair has made my heart ache. I really believe now, however, it will come to nothing. Do you know the contents of the note ?"

"It simply contains an explanation why Mr. Tolliger is not here."

"Then, sir, I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that if you will allow me I will deliver the note myself into the lady's hand before I address one word to her. You shall see me do it, sir."

Towker made the gentleman take a solemn oath to do as he promised, and then delivered

the note and the ladder to the man of law, and stood in a convenient spot to watch the course of events.

His conscience pricked him a little when he reflected that he was departing from his promise in allowing the letter to be delivered by a deputy-postman, but the pricking sensation did not last long. In the course of a very few moments that conscience figuratively slapped him in a friendly fashion on the shoulder, and told him he had done right.

Mr. Ephraim Tolliger proceeded stealthily along the garden path with the ladder, and placed it at a convenient angle for ascending, with its top end about a foot above the window-sill of Julia's apartment.

Then he paused a moment to take in a stock of breath, and to consider the beginning of the speech he intended to recite.

He looked around. All was deliciously calm and peaceful, the trees stood serene and motionless, and the air was filled with the odour of flowers. Then the good gentleman thought of other calm and sweet starlit nights long years ago, when under other trees he plighted troth with the helpmate he had lost; but he

pulled himself sternly together, and commenced the ascent with his nephew's letter in his hand.

Ephraim's mind was not altogether serene as he took step after step. Various thoughts flitted through his brain, and some of them were not pleasant thoughts. He might be taken for a burglar, and suddenly become a target for revolver practice. He might find a big dog waiting at the bottom of the ladder when he came down. The ladder might break, or he might slip off; and he glanced nervously at a glass cucumber frame just beneath him. Then, again, although he felt assured that the young lady would be delighted to see the face of Tolliger nephew appear above her window-sill, it was quite a question if she would be at all delighted at the vision of Tolliger uncle cropping up between her and the starlight. However, he determined to do his duty, and give the young lady such a lecture as would effectually end her dreams of ever marrying his nephew. So up he went, wondering how on earth, or rather in the air, he should conduct himself, in the event of the young lady going into hysterics; but he need not have wondered.

There is no finer moral spectacle than virtuous age exposing itself to unknown peril in order to reprove thoughtless and vicious youth. There was a considerable touch of the heroic in that portly gentleman trusting himself on that frail ladder in the interests of the morality of the world at large.

Just as Mr. Ephraim's head appeared on a little lower level than the window-sill, and just as he was saying to himself: "Now she'll catch it," the bottom half of the window flew up with startling energy, and the vision of a stout, middle-aged lady, armed with a terrific gingham umbrella, rolled up somewhat in the form of a gigantic lettuce, appeared before the bewildered eyes of our deputy-postman.

There was impatience in every feature of that wrathful umbrella as it descended wildly on to the shrinking head and shoulders of Ephraim. Up it went and down it came, mixed with such interjectory expressions as "You villain!" "You monster!" "You midnight marauder!" "You wicked man, to try—and steal—my niece—to rob—a brok-en-hearted widow. Oh, you wretch! you wretch! Oh, you WRETCH!"

The unfortunate gentleman on the ladder could only hold tight and gasp. His hat was gone and his courage with it, and his hair was knocked out of all tidiness and shape. He really did not know if it was his head or the umbrella that kept cracking, while to add to his dismay he felt that he was every moment in danger of dropping in unannounced as a visitor to the cucumbers. He tried to explain. "My dear madam, it's not him, not me—I mean I'm not him, my nephew; oh, I say, goodness me. Help, mercy! don't kill me;" but all this spasmodic eloquence was lost on the excited lady and the equally excited umbrella. The verb "to do" had it all its own way, while the verbs "to be" and "to suffer" had it in a manner they did not appreciate.

However, if you let the pot boil over too long, it will put the fire out, and metaphorically such an extinction of inflammable materials now occurred, though not till that last "oh, you wretch," could Mr. Tolliger get a chance of making himself heard.

With the last agonising "tch" the umbrella dropped into the garden, and the wielder of

it dropped on to the floor of the chamber, quite exhausted by her exertions.

Mr. Ephraim Tolliger's first thought on finding himself let alone was to slide rapidly down the ladder, get his head into his damaged hat, and at once take refuge in his cab; but besides not liking the idea of flying from a woman his curiosity was excited, and he determined on trying to obtain an explanation. When he reflected, too, that his nephew's messenger (our friend Towker) had witnessed the assault, and would undoubtedly testify to his flight, he felt he must remain. He in fact had not courage to be a coward.

Hearing and seeing nothing further of his Amazonian assailant, he took the liberty of stepping in through the open window, and found the lady seated on the floor sobbing violently. This much he saw by the aid of lamp which was burning faintly at the further end of the chamber. The widow, with her face buried in her hands, said sobbingly: "Go away, you wicked man! I have saved my niece from your fiendish clutches, and now go—go, young man, or I will summon assistance."

"My dear madam, it is a mistake altogether," cried Mr. Ephraim. "I am not a young man, and I did not come here to steal your niece. Look at me; please do."

Hearing these words, Mrs. Gane looked up, and, much to her surprise and confusion, saw a good-looking middle-aged gentleman standing at a little distance from her in a most respectful attitude.

"Permit me to assist you to your feet, madam," said he. "I am sorry, very sorry (doubtless he was), that this affair has happened. I now perceive, by the course events have taken, that you were aware of this projected elopement. I thought the arrangement was known only to the principals, your gardener, and myself; and came up that ladder to reprove your niece for her—her—ungrateful conduct towards one who has, I understand, acted as a parent to her for some years, thinking to save her from your displeasure, and you from much pain by not letting you into the secret. You, I perceive, were in the secret, and waited here to reprove my nephew with considerable energy; but I have sent him to Liverpool."

Mrs. Gane, very red in the face and exceedingly vexed with herself, said: "Permit me, sir, to apologise for my sad mistake. Will you now kindly allow me to lead the way to the drawing-room? There I shall be able to offer you some refreshment after the ill-treatment you have experienced."

Mr. Ephraim thanked Mrs. Gane, and they then proceeded to the drawing-room. Here, on the gas being turned up, was discovered on a side-table a decanter of port and some sweet biscuits.

It was quite evident that the lady had determined in her own mind to have some bodily refreshment after her encounter, and had prepared supplies beforehand.

At the lady's suggestion, the gentleman made himself handy in pouring out the wine. Then matters were more fully explained.

"I trust you will pardon my violence," said Mrs. Gane. "My vexation and sorrow are extreme when I reflect upon the brutality of which I have been guilty, but my feelings overcame me. My niece is very, very dear to me, and when I considered that a cruel man was endeavouring to steal her from me

by a disgraceful elopement, I felt that nothing short of inflicting physical pain on the destroyer of the happiness that has hitherto found a home in this house would satisfy me. The woman was swallowed up in the avenger."

"Oh, pray do not mention it, madam," replied Mr. Ephraim. "The beating was a mere trifle; had I known it was coming, I should scarcely have noticed it. It came, however, with such suddenness that I must admit I was startled for the moment. I cannot sufficiently admire your affection for your niece, and your courage, madam, and I quite forgive you any little inconvenience I may have suffered, if you wish me to say as much."

"I thank you very much, sir, for those words," replied the lady. "I had no idea that the gardener had told any one but myself. My niece I have sent to Brighton to stay with my sister for some little time; she has no idea of the reason why I have banished her. But you do not like the wine, sir, I am afraid."

"My dear madam, I do like the wine, I

assure you, very much indeed. Permit me to replenish your glass. It's capital; it is really."

These worthy folks now sat chatting for a considerable time, and strange to say, Mr. Ephraim Tolliger felt within himself that years had passed since he had spent so comfortable an hour. The recollection of his beating had taken itself into unknown regions, and he had not the slightest idea of a bruise anywhere between himself and Charing Cross. His heart warmed with the rare old port and the enjoyment of that snug chat, and at last he said, benevolently beaming on the widow: "After all, my dear madam, perhaps these young folks ought to be forgiven."

The widow simply sighed. Whether from magnetic attraction or out of courtesy, none knoweth; but Mr. Tolliger, following her example, also sighed.

There was a decided difference, however, in the nature and dimensions of the sighs. The lady's was quiet and unobtrusive — a delicate and fragile manifestation; while the gentleman's was a great, awkward, broad-shouldered arrangement, that made its issuer blush and then cough, as if anxious to hide

the actual proportions of this elephantine demonstration of some inner feeling or emotion.

Then he said: "The human heart, my dear madam, needs something to love, something to cherish, some object to wind its tendrils round. Deprived of this something, this object, these tendrils lose their virtue, and become withered and dead, and in time the heart becomes the same. All around us speaks against solitariness. 'Tis a cold world to a lonely man, and if I may say it without giving offence to—to—a——"

"You are not helping yourself, sir, I am afraid," interrupted Mrs. Gane.

"Yes, yes, oh, yes; indeed I am," replied Ephraim, taking up his glass. "Your good health, madam, and—and God bless you!" And the gentleman put down his glass and looked both hot and red at what had so emphatically escaped from his lips. He blew his nose violently to cover his confusion, and continued: "I was about to observe, madam, that it is a cold world to a lonely woman as well as to a lonely man."

"But you, sir," said Mrs. Gane, "objected to the engagement as much as I did. Did you not?" And the lady smiled pleasantly.

"Yes, I did, I did; I admit I did," replied Mr. Tolliger; "but I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance then, madam. I had not the honour of knowing you; I was not then possessed of your friendship, as I think I may say I am now. Had I been so blessed, I should have been induced to reflect—to reflect with a great deal more deliberation than I allowed myself to."

The widow smiled again. It was quite evident that things were working better for the young people than they could reasonably expect. The change in the views of the elder couple may seem great, but it is not unexplainable.

When Ephraim heard of the projected elopement, he at once concluded that some forward girl, and possibly a scheming aunt, had arranged it to secure his priceless nephew.

To his surprise, nephews were quoted extremely low, in fact no price was offered in this particular market; but the quotation for nieces was so high as to be almost fabulous.

Mrs. Gane had reasoned in the same sort of fashion as Ephraim, and she now found to her astonishment that nephews were not to be

got, while nieces were a mere drug, quite unsaleable.

A glance at this state of affairs shows any looker-on, that the moment Prejudice gets its back broken, the nephew will fall and the niece will rise in the uncle's estimation, while the niece will fall and the nephew will rise in the estimation of the aunt, till in the eyes of these two worthy seniors, the two juniors will be on a level.

Prejudice, beware! thou art in much danger. A serious disarrangement of the bones of thy vertebræ is imminent.

Mrs. Gane saw in Mr. Ephraim Tolliger a good-looking, hearty, and unmistakable gentleman, of about fifty years of age.

Prejudice lies panting, unable to move, fearing speedy demise.

Ephraim saw in Mrs. Gane a good-looking, hearty lady, of middle age, in a room that spoke of good taste and comfort, with some approaches to luxury.

Common sense now deliberately jumped on the back of Prejudice, and it became a cold corpse immediately.

We will now retire for a little while, leaving

these good folks making amicable arrangements for the return of the banished ones, and kindly provision for a proper engagement between them, while we busy ourselves with putting the ladder back in the shed. We also pick up the hat and brush it, and hang it, yea, even on the handle of its would-be destroyer, the bloodthirsty gingham to show that all animosity is at an end.

It may be stated here, as well as anywhere else, that not only did Tolliger junior eventually marry the niece, but that on the very same day, Tolliger senior married the aunt.

To return for a moment. Mr. Towker, of course, witnessed the assault and battery. He also secured his friend's letter which dropped from Ephraim's hand into the garden. When Ephraim disappeared through the window, Towker stood for some little time irresolute. He hardly liked to go away, and yet he could see no use in staying where he was. Presently he thought he would view the front of the house. Here he found the gas lit, and no sign of any murder being done on the body of the man of law. Still, however, feeling

curious, he cautiously entered the front garden in hopes of being able to see through some chink in the Venetian blinds. Fortune favoured him; and much to his amazement and also delight, he spied Ephraim looking quite at home, and sipping port like an invited guest, while Mrs. Gane sat smiling and chatting away in the most amiable manner possible. Mr. Towker, now thoroughly content, hastened home.





CHAPTER XVII.

Which contains, among other things, an account of the very last sudden impulse that Mr. Fielder yielded to.

THE next few days saw several important events occur—some looked for and some unlooked for—all of which Mr. Towker bore with as much philosophy as he could call to his aid at such a short notice.

In the first place, Tolliger the lover was back again, and after a short interview with his uncle in London, rushed home and jubilantly embracing his friend Towker, informed him of what the reader already knows.

There was more of a triumph in this arrangement for Mr. Towker than he at first sight thought possible. He knew he had done the right thing in giving Mr. Ephraim his nephew's

letter to deliver, because he felt that had he gone up the ladder and been interviewed by the umbrella, his flight would have been speedy, and Tolliger would have been still in Liverpool waiting for the unknown stranger, with his love-suit as hopelessly beclouded as ever it was.

Again, had he not remained in the garden while Mr. Ephraim ascended the ladder, that gentleman would, on his own confession to his nephew, in all probability have made an immediate exodus at the first possible moment.

Reflecting on these things, Mr. Towker felt much satisfaction as to the course he had taken in both the cases of Fielder and Tolliger. He felt a certain amount of humiliation, however, when the unpleasant truth that, clever as he was in helping others, he was not clever enough to help himself, forced itself upon his consideration.

He took comfort in the thought, however, that both Fielder and Tolliger were now his friends for ever, and he yet hoped to hit on a scheme, where one or both of these gentlemen might be able to assist him, in freeing himself from his unpleasant and galling chains

The second event to be recorded is the departure from town to Yarmouth, for two or three weeks' holiday, of Messrs. Jubb, Pommer, Gloster, Jurdon, Corner, and Fielder. As Mrs. Jubb had declared it to be her intention to remain at home, Jubb had persuaded these other merry men to go with him, so as to form a nice little bachelor party.

Mrs. Jubb, it may be said, would have liked the change, but she feared that the temptation to fly would be too strong for her victim; so she decided to forego pleasure, that she might continue to inflict pain.

Leaving this lady to gratify her spite, it now becomes a pleasant duty to indulge in a change of air, by following the bachelor party to Yarmouth.

'Twas the month of August, and a glorious blazing August it was. There are people who, in vulgar language, turn up their noses at the mention of Yarmouth. Let it so be. They may turn up their noses to such an extent that they may be used for hat-pegs; but Yarmouth will laugh and be jolly, just as if these nose-elevators existed not.

Mr. Jubb and his friends were certainly not

in the class of people, who indulged in the facial gymnastics just alluded to. They meant enjoying themselves for a blessed three weeks by the sea, on the sea, and in the sea. Think of it and howl, ye baking cockneys! Three weeks of a saline and fishy paradise, with the primitive aprons represented by a gay but scanty bathing costume. Three weeks away from toil and care, face to face and heart to heart with the great and mighty sea, emblem of strength, and giver of health. Gaze upon these six and envy them. Now they wander down the narrow rows, and peep into the smoky places, where the immortal bloater is dried and ham-cured. Now they are out on the jetty, drinking in the life-giving breeze, now they are in the Barking smack, drinking in something that is not a breeze, but very nice, notwithstanding, only more expensive than a lot of breezes. Now they are wandering away on the glorious stretch of sand, in the yellow moonlight, listening to the strong roar of the great deep. Now they are on the bosom of the sea. Their yacht spreads its wings and flies away, away, from the sandy shore, "Yo heave, ho! Away we go! A life on the ocean

wave, A home on the rolling deep." Now they are in the very arms of the monster, and the strength of the sea goes into their limbs and lungs, and hearts.

Mr. Fielder, perhaps, is more to blame (if blame is the word) than any of the others for bringing us to Yarmouth just at the present time, since, having learned so much about this unfortunate victim to sudden impulses, the reader may like to hear about the very last time (according to his own account) that he yielded to condensed temptation.

It was Mr. Pommer's habit to remain in bed till breakfast time, but the other members of the party were wont to hire a boat about seven o'clock in the morning, and row out to sea about half a mile for bathing purposes. Mr. Corner, however, did not swim from the boat; in fact, he could not swim at all, and so used, in company with Mr. Pommer, to climb down into the sea out of a bathing machine.

As a boatman, however, he was extremely useful. When his friends dived overboard, he used to row about gently among them, and assist them to climb aboard again when they grew tired of the exercise.

The others occasionally gave him a bit of splashing for fun, but that he cared little for, since in order to look the boatman to the life, he came out without collar or necktie, and left his watch and chain at the hotel. He also affected a rough old jacket and a slouched hat, so that any amount of wetting would do him little harm.

Jubb, Jurdon, Gloster, and Fielder enjoyed their swimming immensely. The first three named were very good swimmers, Jurdon being the best. Fielder was a poor swimmer, and soon tired. Had it not been for the confidence he felt in the skill and strength of his companions, he would not have ventured to bathe from the boat.

One morning, having rowed as usual to the distance of about half a mile from the shore, the four men undressed. Jubb went overboard first, and was quickly followed by Jurdon and Gloster. Fielder was preparing for his plunge, when Mr. Corner unwittingly stood up in the front of him. Then, to use his own words, came the impulse, and with a yell of "Look out, below!" he gave Mr. Corner a push that sent him flying overboard. Then

he sprang after him, and speedily had him by the collar of his coat. As the others were on the spot there was no danger of the man drowning.

"Ow! ow! ow!" screamed Mr. Corner as he got his head out of the pickle, and felt strong arms holding him up. "Put me in the boat! Put me in the boat! I'm drowning! I'm choking! I'm suffocating! For mercy's sake put me in the boat!"

Mr. Corner was now hoisted up, and presently rolled into the bottom of the boat, where he lay panting for breath, but safe.

"Row about, old man, and dry yourself," cried the chuckling friends in chorus; for, although they had no hand in the villany, they enjoyed Corner's mishap just as much as if they had.

"Mr. Corner," cried Fielder, with a grave look upon his face, "I trust you will forgive me; I'm extremely sorry I yielded to the temptation."

Corner growled, and the four swimmers turned their backs to the boat, to enjoy their exercise.

"Oh lor, oh lor!" said Jurdon; "what a lark to tell at the breakfast table! Poor old

Corner! won't he look sheepish?" And the undertaker laughed so heartily as he pictured the scene to himself, that he bit about a reputed pint out of the top edge of a bounding billow, and choked and gasped to such an extent that he grew quite hot, despite the coolness of the water.

Who so merry as our four friends? They swam and laughed, and splashed in a way that told of very high spirits and excellent health.

They were swimming in a line, when, Mr. Jubb, happening to turn his head, cried out loudly :

"I say, you fellows, look what that Corner's up to. Good gracious! He can never mean to leave us. Why, we must be nearly half a mile from the shore."

The four swimmers now turned round in a state of great alarm. There was doubt concerning Corner's intention. He was seventy or eighty yards away and pulling for dear life.

"Corner!" the bathers yelled in chorus.
"Mr. Corner! Corner, old boy!"

"All right!" shouted Mr. Corner in reply, as he took a little rest. "You have had your joke—now it's my turn." And he started rowing again, but only in a gentle fashion, as he

well knew the swimmers could not catch him up.

Mr. Fielder was horribly frightened, being, as has already been stated, a very poor swimmer. He felt that without plenty of assistance he must inevitably drown. He cried out in real terror: "Mr. Corner! oh, Mr. Corner! pray come back! I shall be drowned—I shall be drowned!"

"Serve you right," shouted Corner. "Have you got any last words to send home to the Butterbanks? What will you have put on your tombstone, if we find your body?"

Jurdon cried out suddenly, feigning to sink: "Corner, old boy, no jokes! I've got the cramp! Oh! oh! ow!!!"

"Have you, though?" shouted Mr. Corner. "Make the most of it; it's about the last thing you'll have the chance of getting. If you've got too much, divide it amongst you; don't be selfish." And away he pulled at the oars again.

The swimmers did not get along very fast. Fielder, from fear and exhaustion, was scarcely able to swim at all; and two of the others had to keep continually alongside of him to

give him aid and encouragement. He was as white as a ghost, and shivered, despite his exertions.

Mr. Corner did not seem in any particular hurry to reach the shore. He thought there might come a moment when his assistance would be absolutely necessary, so he decreased his distance to about twenty yards, a nice convenient distance for holding conversation.

Several times the puffing and panting four entreated him to let them come on board, but he would not. "Swimming," he reminded them, "was what they came out for, not rowing, or being rowed in a boat." He sternly refused to believe that Fielder was the only man responsible for his upsetting. "I suppose you didn't all laugh," jeered the boatman. "I suppose you all frowned on that animated corpse there, did you not? I presume you punched his head and ducked him for his misconduct; of course you did, you precious lot of villains. Look here, my studies of the human figure!"

"Look at the wretch!" yelled Mr. Gloster. And they looked appalled, for he was filling every boot with the sad sea waves, and

depositing them carefully on the seats lest any of the water should spill.

As they were now nearing the end of the jetty, Mr. Corner felt safe in increasing his distance from the swimmers ; and, in fact, arrived there about one hundred yards ahead of the four. Attaching his boat's rope to a ring, he hastily rolled up all Mr. Fielder's clothes, except his hat and boots, and then stood watching the disciples of enforced natation for a few moments. When they were within about twenty yards of safety he shouted out a cheery "Bye, bye," and trotted off with his bundle.

This felonious act had not been rightly understood by the four friends, for he had wrapped up Mr. Fielder's clothes in a large towel. The sight of this bundle threw them off the scent ; they imagined he had secured all the towels. To their delight, however, he had not, and they commenced rubbing themselves down as they contemplated their well-filled boots with disgust.

It was when they came to dress that the hideous truth dawned on Fielder. All he had to go ashore in were his boots, hat, and bathing costume. A nice, cool array for a hot summer's

morning, but scarcely sufficient to venture along the jetty and up to the hotel in.

Poor Fielder got very little sympathy from his companions, and this is scarcely to be wondered at, considering the inconvenience he had put them to. In vain he pleaded a "sudden impulse;" they would have none of it, but laughed exultingly at his painful position, and made all manner of fun of him.

Nor were they alone in this, for as Mr. Corner trotted along the pier he gave two or three dozen idlers information that a merman had been captured out at sea. The report spread, and there was much hurrying up to get a glimpse of the strange creature. Some of them actually believed the report, for what with having a wild look about his eyes, and a white face, the only portion of him visible, all other parts of him being swathed in towels for warmth and decency's sake, he looked, imagination helping, like an untamed creature from foreign parts. The believers were, however, speedily undeceived, for presently the inhabitant of sea caves cried: "For goodness' sake, one of you fellows go and get my clothes, or I shall perish, and one of you light a cigar and

pop it into my mouth." The idea of a merman talking English, wanting his clothes, and being capable of smoking a cigar, was so preposterous that it exploded into laughter.

The other members of the party were of course speedily dressed, and soon became comfortable in their minds and bodies, but Mr. Fielder grew more uncomfortable every moment in both body and mind. In fact, he had arrived at such a melancholy state of mind, that he was considering whether it would not be a good thing to quietly drop overboard and drown, when a waiter from the hotel came rapidly along the jetty with his much-desired garments, in which he speedily arrayed himself.

As Jurdon had prophesied, there was a joke to tell at the breakfast table, but somehow, it did not take quite the shape he at first expected.

It was felt, however, by all concerned, that Mr. Corner had received great provocation, so by mutual consent all was to be passed over.

It would have been impossible, however, to find a more serious-looking face than Fielder

wore for some hours without you went into a churchyard and dug it up. Even then Fielder's face would have stood a chance of honourable mention, if it missed getting the medal. His eyebrows were up as if trying to join issue with his hair and become part of that continent, instead of being islands on their own account, while the corners of his mouth were down as if they had an appointment to meet under his chin, and meant to keep it.

No sudden impulses came along that day, or if they did, Mr. Fielder declined to recognise any of that family and gave them enough cold shoulder for a parish full of them. In the evening, however, he brightened up a bit, and as the firm of Jubb & Co. were separating for the night, he said to Mr. Corner, "Can you spare me five minutes in my room before you retire?"

Mr. Corner looked alarmed and drew back. Visions of duels in a dark room haunted him, or of being flung on to Mr. Fielder's bed and choked.

The victim saw this and smiled sadly.

"You need not mistrust me," said he to

Corner. "As the others have gone this room will do. Mr. Corner," and he took that gentleman by the hand and shook it earnestly and affectionately, "I sincerely thank you for the manner in which you acted this morning. You have cured me, sir; I feel it here," and Mr. Fielder thumped his chest proudly. "I feel that never again shall I be foolish enough to yield to these sudden temptations. Good-night, sir, good-night!" And so they separated.





CHAPTER XVIII.

Mrs. Jubb, after seeing to her captive's bonds, goes to Yarmouth. Mr. Jubb, being unprepared with a dinner for Sunday, begs his five friends to see to it. They do see to it.

A VERY unexpected event now happened to Mr. Towker, and he hardly knew whether it would turn out friendly or unfriendly to that escape he was daily dreaming of. After turning the matter a good many times over and over in his mind, he came to the conclusion that it could not aid him, but that it might possibly hinder by delaying any project he might conceive. This was rather a vague conclusion, and went to prove that our friend James could see no further through a brick wall than any one else.

The event hinted at was this: Mrs. Isabel

Towker was summoned suddenly into Cambridgeshire to attend the bedside of her mother, who was dangerously ill. James could get no holidays for at least a month, so had to be content, as the summons was imperative, to send his wife and baby off by train. This happened on a Wednesday, about ten days after Mr. Jubb and his friends had departed for Yarmouth.

Mrs. Jubb was a woman of action. At parting "dear Isabel" promised "dear Ethel" to write the moment she arrived at her destination, Mrs. Jubb being anxious to learn that the journey was accomplished safely. The letter arrived, and Mrs. Jubb learned therefrom that Isabel would probably be away for three or four weeks. This suited her amazingly, and she at once wrote off to Mr. Jubb telling him to expect her at Yarmouth by the boat which arrived there on Saturday evening, as she meant to have a little sea voyage and a week at Yarmouth. This letter was written on Thursday evening, and shortly after it was posted she proceeded upstairs and informed Messrs. Towker and Tolliger that she was going away for a week and had given the servant a holiday for the same time. She

had, however, arranged with a charwoman who would come in every day and put the place straight and fetch any provisions the two bachelors might require. The woman would be in waiting at seven o'clock every morning to get their breakfast ready, clean boots, and so on. Mrs. Jubb had known her for a long time and could thoroughly trust her, so they need not fear to leave her in the house to finish her work, she could then let herself out. As this inconvenience would last only a few days the two men made no objection, and the matter was settled according to the arrangements of Mrs. Jubb.

Then the lady smiled sweetly on both, thanked them, said "Good-night," and disappeared.

The next morning as Mr. Towker descended the stairs and stood in the hall, he was not over-pleased to find himself confronted by Mrs. Jubb, who emerged from her den with a suddenness that was almost appalling.

Said that lady: "I shall not look for you to make any strategic movement in the direction of flight during my absence, Mr. Towker."

Towker made no answer, although Mrs. Jubb paused for the purpose of giving him an opportunity.

"Because," continued his tormentor, "although you might possibly escape the vengeance of Mr. Jubb by a cowardly retreat, you would not escape mine, for now I have another address to assist me in tracking you."

By another address Mrs. Jubb meant to remind Towker of what he already knew, that Ethel had wheedled out of Isabel the name and address of the firm where James was employed.

Towker looked at his gaoler gloomily, but said nothing. He had grown to view her with so much contempt, that although he still shrank from the idea of Isabel reading the epistles to Ethel, Mrs. Jubb was not now capable of inspiring him with that fear he once felt.

Then he strode forth.

Leaving Mrs. Jubb to prepare to face the dangers of the ocean, it becomes our duty and possibly pleasure to see how Jubb & Co. are getting on at Yarmouth.

With glorious weather, good spirits, and plenty to eat and drink, they voted it a most enjoyable holiday, as doubtless it was.

On the second Friday, however, Mr. Jubb received the letter informing him of his wife's

intention to come down to Yarmouth on the morrow, and requesting him to look for some suitable apartments near the sea, as she did not care for staying at an hotel.

On the Saturday morning Jubb sought and obtained suitable apartments, and explained to the landlady of the house that his wife would not be in till the evening, as she was coming down by the boat.

“Shall I get anything in for supper, sir?” inquired the landlady.

“No, thank you,” replied Jubb. “My wife likes to do her own marketing, I know, and the boat will be in about seven, so there will be plenty of time.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Mr. Jubb and his friends, all smart as new pins, sought the Quay on Saturday evening to receive Mrs. Jubb. They were in good time, too, in fact about an hour too early, it being no later than six o'clock.

No boat was there or likely to be there for some time, so the little company agreed to adjourn for a glass of ale and a cigar each. A glass or two each and a chat soon got rid of

the best part of an hour, and then the inseparable six sought the Quay again.

Here they found scores and scores of people waiting. Friends waiting for friends, and relatives for relatives; fellows on the look-out to carry luggage, lodging-house keepers on the look-out for victims, and idlers just waiting to see the boat in, out of curiosity.

Seven o'clock struck, and so, alas! did eight, but no boat came in sight. At eight o'clock it was considered desirable to have another adjournment, as the waiting grew wearisome, and the night was growing chill.

Promising a tall and hungry-looking youth sixpence, if he would let them know the moment there was news of the boat, Jubb and his friends left the anxious crowd.

Over a cheering glass and cigar, the time sped, and Mr. Jubb, who was getting fearful some accident might have occurred, at half-past eight declared his intention of re-visiting the Quay. His friends accompanied him, but nothing of interest had occurred, save that the crowd had greatly increased. By nine o'clock it was simply enormous, and much anxiety

was expressed, for the day had been fine with a favourable wind, so that the boat should have been in, at the latest, by seven o'clock.

Mr. Jubb, who had gained a place close by the landing-stage, expressed his intention of remaining there, but the others, in twos and threes, kept up the adjournment business very fairly.

By ten o'clock many of the people who were expecting relations or friends were crying. They felt sure that some terrible disaster had happened. Some took vehicles to Gorlestone, at the mouth of the river, but they came back again, being only able to say that there was a large crowd there, but no news of the vessel. A chill pervaded the vast crowd, and the sound of sobbing was heard from many quarters. Big, strong fellows, that two or three hours ago were brimful of mirth, looked white and pinched about the face with mental suffering.

Poor Jubb had kept his place, but the adjourners had not been unmindful of his comfort, having supplied him with a pocket-pistol loaded.

All on a sudden, shortly before eleven, there ran a sharp thrill through the crowd, and then

a hearty cheer was heard from a thousand full throats, for the boat was sighted, and fear was at an end.

Mr. Jubb and his friends who were close to the landing-stage looked at each other, and shook hands joyfully.

The passengers, as they came ashore, seemed in the best of spirits. Something had gone wrong with the machinery, causing a long delay, but unattended with any danger to either the boat or its load.

Jubb caught his wife in his arms as she landed, and gave her a hearty embrace and kiss, a proceeding which caused the crowd in that particular spot to cry "Hurrah!" in a right honest and sympathetic fashion.

Mrs. Jubb, after shaking hands with her husband's friends, said to that gentleman: "Mr. Jubb, have you thought of to-morrow's dinner?"

Jubb was almost stunned. The situation had not a grain of humour in it. It was utterly bad, and growing worse every moment, for the time was fast approaching when all shops would be closed, or closing.

Jubb, as the reader knows, had left Sunday's dinner for his wife to see about, anticipating

she would arrive at Yarmouth some three or four hours before she did. This done, he had dismissed the matter from his mind. What was to be done now? His wife was tired with her protracted voyage, and there was neither bit nor drop at their apartments.

Mr. Jubb glared for a moment like a wild man, then, popping his wife and her luggage into a vehicle, he said to her: "One moment, Ethel," and returned to his friends. To them he said hastily: "You fellows must do it; we've got nothing for to-morrow's dinner, and I must take Mrs. Jubb to our place. Get us something—anything, no matter what. You know the house—No. 14. Don't, don't desert me in the hour of need."

"All right, old fellow," his five friends cried in chorus. "You get along home with Mrs. Jubb; we'll get you something for dinner to-morrow, and for supper to-night as well. Don't you fear; you get away home."

"Thanks!" cried the hearty Jubb; "thanks! And don't forget the gallon of bitter; you can come round in the morning, and have a glass with us."

Then Jubb dropped into the carriage with

a force that made the driver utter a short howl as he thought of his springs, and the vehicle waded off to No. 14.

Mr. Jubb's friends concluded to hold a consultation for two or three minutes as to the most suitable joint to get for a Sunday's dinner, and so adjourned as aforetime.

It must not be supposed that these frequent adjournments had in no wise disturbed the mental equilibrium of these five men. If the truth must be told, there was very little equilibrium now discoverable. Whether the equilibrium was asleep on the floor it is hard to say; but its perch was vacant in each case.

By the time Mr. and Mrs. Jubb had arrived at their lodgings, and Ethel had got her hat and jacket off, and refreshed herself with a slight wash, and put her hair straight, the time was close to eleven; and as they both were hungry, Mr. Jubb began to get anxious, and presently said:

"The eatables will be all right, I am sure; but I'm afraid they'll forget the ale. I'll just pop up to the corner and get a gallon. It will not be wasted, even if they do bring what I told them to."

Mr. Jubb popped up, as he expressed it, to the corner, and asked the publican to be good enough to send a gallon of bitter at once to No. 14; which gallon a boy started with, and got there as soon as Mr. Jubb, who merely stayed a moment or so to light a cigar, and remark upon the uneasiness felt by the town at the delay of the boat's arrival. He also took home a bottle of brandy, in case any of the "boys," as he called them, dropped in at any time for a nip.

Jubb had scarcely arrived at his lodgings again, when Mr. Corner came in. He exhibited a cold roast chicken wrapped in a newspaper, and a half-quartern loaf. These, as he explained, were for supper, and were produced from under his left arm.

Under his right arm he had a very fine leg of mutton also wrapped up in a newspaper; this was for the Sunday dinner. In one hand he bore a gallon bottle of ale, and in the other a gallon bottle of stout. "Shtop a minute," said he with a sickly laugh; "theshe are not all;" and when he had laid the above-mentioned articles down, he proceeded to extract from his coat pocket a bottle of whisky. "There," said he

with an illuminated look; "I think thattledo; you can trust me, Misser Jubb, if you can trust no one else."

"But where are the others?" inquired Mr. Jubb.

"Oh, I dunno," replied Mr. Corner contemptuously; "der-runk I expect by this time. They couldn't agree what to get, so I left 'em arguing and drinking and saw to the matter myself. Hate such lots of nonsense. What's better or nicer than a juicy leg o' mutton, eh?"

This was to Mr. Pommer, who made his appearance armed with a very nice ham. "Couldn't trust butcher's meat," said the Assassin cheerily, as he dropped gently in a chair with half a smile and half a sigh. "Ham (hie) is best, and as I was in the shop I thought a tongue would do nicely for supper, and here it is, with the pickles."

"Where?" inquired Mrs. Jubb, as she eyed Mr. Pommer with a look of contempt; "I can't see it!"

"Oh, I forgot," said Pommer, "I put 'em down on the stones, to open the door. I'll go and fetch 'em." He went and fetched them,

and fetched also a gallon of bitter, which he had not forgotten to get, although he'd forgotten to mention it when enumerating his purchases.

Mr. Jubb was sincerely hoping his other friends would come empty-handed, when Mr. Gloster arrived.

He buttonholed Jubb, and gravely assured him that seeing no agreement could be arrived at by arguing, he had entirely alone and unassisted, purchased the loveliest sirloin of beef ever seen in any butcher's shop, and being not unmindful of Mrs. and Mr. Jubb's breakfast in the morning, he had secured two magnificent mutton chops.

"Butcher!" yelled a voice outside; and Mrs. Jubb hastened to the door, and received Mr. Gloster's purchases, which as that gentleman announced from inside the room she had just quitted, were "bought and paid for."

Mr. Gloster confessed with much sorrow, that he had quite forgotten the ale, but produced two bottles of whisky, and laid them on the overloaded table.

Notwithstanding the arrival of all this stock

of provisions and cheering drinks, the family expression on the faces of the Jubbs was not a happy one.

They looked at each other and at Messrs. Corner, Pommer, and Gloster gloomily.

The trio of caterers, too, looked uneasy. Pommer was gazing with open contempt at Mr. Corner's mutton, while the mutton-man was looking at Gloster's beef as if he knew it to have recently belonged to a horse; Mr. Gloster all the time sniffing in the direction of Pommer's ham, and muttering to Corner, "Bet it's 'igh."

Mrs. Jubb had drawn the cork of one of the ale-bottles, and was in the act of filling several tumblers with the bitter, when the noise of a fly driving up and coming to a stop at the door arrested general attention.

From the fly stepped Mr. Jurdon, followed by Fielder. Jurdon cried out to the driver: "Bring 'em in," and then entered the house.

These two worthies had, it appears, met just as each had finished provisioning, and hired a passing fly to save the labour of carrying their stock of commodities,

Poor Jubb gave a great groan of despair, for the coachman presently entered with a couple of ducks, a loin of pork, and a shoulder of mutton.

Having deposited these articles on the table, coachy went back, and quickly reappeared with two gallon bottles of bitter. This completed the list.

Mrs. Jubb looked rather scornfully on the noble five, who one and all sat nodding and shaking their heads at one another in a manner which plainly said that every man there considered himself quite sober, and the other four just the reverse.

The comicality of the affair at last struck Jubb so severely, that he all at once burst into a huge roar of laughter. A moment later his wife joined him, and general merriment ensued. In fact, so violent was the mirth, that any one in the street could easily enough have put it down to a small lunatic asylum being tickled to death.

"You are a nice lot to go marketing," said Mrs. Jubb, when she could get her breath. "Where are the vegetables? Where are the materials even for a simple pie? All this shop-

load of meat, too, to one half-quartern loaf. There, I'll say no more about it ; I dare say the landlady can help me. You have all done your best, so, gentlemen, I thank you."





CHAPTER XIX.

Basest things have their uses. The visit of a bold, bad burglar results in the dawn of hope to the captive.

SCENE : The exterior of Jubb's house.
Time : One o'clock in the morning.
Tableau : Mr. James Towker and his friend Mr. Tolliger sitting on the doorstep.

Singular, but easily explained. They could not get in.

The two friends had made up their minds to have an evening at the theatre together. This arrangement came off satisfactorily. They next proceeded to a supper-bar, and had something to refresh the inner man. Perfectly sober, they caught the last train from town, and arrived at their lodgings at about 12.45. Towker's latch-key went in first, and turned

the wards of the lock ; but the door refused to open. Tolliger's latch-key re-locked the door and unlocked it again, and still the door was obstinate ; set fast, in fact. The two gentlemen did not like it. Not only were they kept out of their beds, but there was something mysterious and creepy about a door that would consent to unlock but would not consent to open. Whether some one was in the house and had secured the door by using the big lock, for the door had both a large and a small lock, or by bolting it, they could not tell. It was not a pleasant situation.

"It is just possible," said Towker, "that the wire that generally holds the big lock back is broken."

This afterwards turned out to be the case, but as yet it was not known to be so, only surmised by Towker.

After trying over and over again they sat on the door-step to reflect. Presently Tolliger said: "We are clearly on the wrong side of the door."

Towker looked at Tolliger as a man looks at another, who is suspected of being at times "touched;" for the remark was made as seriously

as if it had been the natural outcome of a long train of judicial thought.

“If we could get a short ladder,” said Tolliger, “we could get over the side wall. Then using the ladder again we could get on to the kitchen leads, then pull up the ladder and get to the top of the cistern. From there we could climb into the staircase window.”

“I know where to get a ladder,” replied Towker; “but ’pon my honour I shouldn’t care to get in that way. Suppose some fellow’s inside, you know, he might pot me with a bullet. I’ll get a ladder if you’ll go up and come downstairs and let me in.”

“Well,” said Mr. Tolliger, “perhaps the best plan will be for both of us to go up that way. Then we can come downstairs together, you know.”

This plan was agreed to, and then Mr. Towker went down a street or two to the house of a builder, who kept ladders of all sorts and sizes in his front garden. There was no difficulty in securing a short ladder, to be returned with thanks in the morning; so Mr. Towker, feeling however rather nervous over the matter, secured his prize at once.

Over the wall now went Messrs. Tolliger and Towker, then up on to the kitchen leads, and on to the cistern, finishing their climb by crawling in through the staircase window. Towker now flung the ladder back into the garden, and a light having been secured, they boldly sought the lower part of the house.

Towker's surmise was now seen to be correct, for the wire which usually held the big lock back all day, and was usually removed at night, had by reason of age and decay snapped, and the bolt of course shot into its natural home.

Laughing at their adventure, our heroes now said "Good-night!" and sought their respective bed-chambers.

Towker somehow did not seem very sleepy. The man was not happy in being a captive lodger, and now being lonely in consequence of the absence of his wife, he felt unhappier than ever.

"This is Wednesday," he sighed; "the Jubbs will be home on Saturday, and then recommences my hateful torment. There, I'll try to go to sleep." The man dozed; then he woke again; then he dozed, and woke again; and this went on for the greater part of an

hour. Suddenly he fancied he heard a slight noise somewhere downstairs. He tried to attribute it to imagination, but imagination pleaded "Not guilty." There was a creepy-creepy sensation about Towker's backbone as he quietly got out of bed and noiselessly opened the door of his room. He could hear nothing, but it seemed to him that there was a very cool wind wandering about the premises. This he could scarcely understand, for he felt persuaded that Mr. Tolliger had closed the staircase window after their entry. As two short flights of stairs would bring him to the window, he determined to investigate. On his way down, however, he was suddenly brought up aghast. At the bottom of the first flight was a door he had never till this moment seen open. It was clearly open now some two or three inches, and he could see a tiny gleam of light through the keyhole. This room belonged to the Jubbs; it was a small room, a sort of private room where Mrs. Jubb sometimes invited Mrs. Towker in for a confidential chat.

Mr. Towker paused, as many a bolder man than Towker would in similar circumstances; but seeing that one more step would place the

handle of the door in his possession, and thinking he would hold on and yell for Tolliger if necessary, he took the one step necessary, and stooping down, applied his eye to the keyhole.

This is what he saw. A man bent on schemes of felony; for on the table Mr. Towker discerned, by the aid of a bit of rushlight burning, some silver spoons, a gold brooch, a chain, and other articles of value. He had evidently gone through the room systematically, for a cabinet with many drawers had been opened, and a cupboard that seemed to contain principally spare sheets, blankets, and general bed-furnishings, was evidently at his mercy. On the floor and table were strewn books, papers, and articles of wearing apparel, as if the thief had gone under, inside, and behind all these things useless to him, on the look-out for more portable articles of value. He had evidently come across one article that he meant to secrete about him, and this was some sherry in a decanter. He had probably concealed most of the sherry, for just at the moment when James first spied him, the bottom of the decanter was pointed to the ceiling, and the last

dose of the "mixture as before" was bounding, with sundry gulps and gurgles, down the throat of the bold burglar.

This operation concluded, the midnight collector of trifles began to gather all he intended to take in a little heap before him, preparatory to stowing them away in his pockets in such a fashion that no unusual bumpiness might catch the eye of a chance policeman.

Still the fellow seemed in no hurry to begin to go. The little bit of candle showed he had a red nose, and as he eyed the decanter affectionately, it seemed quite probable that he might have another look round for comforting drinks before he departed.

Evidently the generous wine had taken some effect, for in low but husky tones the marauding rascal began to chant:

Then name the day, the wedding day,
And I will "prig" the ring.

Whether it was the indignation that naturally arose in the bosom of Towker at the idea of any person presuming to go through the solemnities of the marriage service with a stolen ring, or whether

it was the fact that the morning breeze which came through the open staircase window, seemed every moment growing cooler, no one knows, but it suddenly occurred to him that he ought to be doing something.

Here the burglar began another chant, as he commenced to poke his prizes into various pockets :

My father he got "penal,"
My mother she got "hard ;"
So now I am a casual,
And labour in the yard.

Here Mr. Tolliger's door was heard to open with a snap, and the voice of that individual cried :

"Is that you, Towker, singing?"

Here was a fix for Towker. The burglar had evidently taken the alarm, and was coming on tiptoe towards the door, armed with the empty decanter. A moment or two before Towker had thought he ought to be doing something, and now he knew he must. He did not, however, catch hold of the handle of the door, with the intention of capturing the burglar. He forgot all about his previous arrangements in the hurry of the moment, and fled wildly down stairs,

crying at the top of his voice : " Police ! Police ! Thieves ! Help ! "

The burglar, hearing inquiries at the top of the house concerning his vocal efforts, and also hearing the flying yell below making for the street, concluded to leave. He comprehended the situation in its entirety, and knew well enough that he was the cause of all this fuss. Being a man accustomed to emergencies and knowing possible dangers were both above and below, he concluded to retreat in close order the way he came, which was precisely the fashion in which Messrs. Towker and Tolliger had gained an entry. They had, in fact, shown the rascal how to do it, for, all unknown to them, he had seen the successive ascents to kitchen leads, cistern, and window. The freebooter, therefore, at once rushed to the open window, gained it, and commenced to descend the ladder just as Mr. Tolliger, alarmed by the outcry of his fellow-lodger, came flying downstairs and appeared on the scene. Tolliger just caught sight of the felonious head disappearing, and hardly knowing what he was about, rushed past the window and into the demoralised room, with a view

of finding some weapon of offence. Seizing the first heavy article he could lay hands on, he arrived at the window just as the burglar safely landed on the cistern lid.

Tolliger with a yell hurled his weapon at the thief, who, being a bit staggered at the sudden reception of an unexpected missile on the top of his head, made an ugly and heavy lunge on the corner of the cistern lid, which very properly resented such treatment, and dropped him into the water. Sherry and water not being so strong as sherry simple, and he now having both, experienced a sudden and positive sobriety that enabled him, knowing the land, to extricate himself from the tank, drop down on to the kitchen leads, and from thence into the garden. The garden wall might have proved a little difficulty in his way had not Tolliger on seeing him thus escaping hurled the ladder after him, in hopes of disabling the miscreant. The ladder however arrived just in time, and was set against the wall and used by the damp vagabond with all speed. It is unnecessary to state that the burglar did not stay to say "Good-night" to Mr. Towker, who at the same moment as he (the thief) tumbled

over the wall, had managed to get the street-door open, and was now on the side-walk yelling for assistance.

Mr. Towker ought to have been out on the pavement first, considering the start he had, and the fact that flights of stairs are better adapted for rapid travelling than ladders, cisterns, and kitchen leads. He however had been so handicapped by nervousness and the visions of innumerable burglars at his back, that it took him a considerable little time to undo the bolts in the dark and get the door open.

Police of course came running up, and were sent on the track of the burglar; the wet trail assisted them for a little time, but it soon became lost; possibly the thief ran himself dry, at all events the policemen did, and were not slow to hint at it, when they returned unsuccessful from the chase. This, however, was soon got over, although the getting over it was the cause of several bottles of Bass becoming dead men.

The thief, it may be said here, was not caught, although the active and intelligent officers took up several red-nosed individuals

on suspicion. This is not said in a spirit of carping at the police; the thieves they do catch, and the robberies they prevent, entitle them to every sensible man's gratitude.

As Mr. Tolliger and Mr. Towker did not feel very sleepy, and it was about half-past three, and daylight, when the refreshed officers left with all particulars to be handed in at the station-house, they concluded to have a refreshing wash, and fully dress themselves.

This done, they went on a further tour of inspection. They had already had a look round in company with the policemen.

Mrs. Jubb's boudoir was in a terrible state of confusion; books, papers, and clothes were strewn about anyhow over the table, chairs, and floor. The wreckage also extended beyond the boundaries of the room, for what with the thief's rush out, and Tolliger's desperate inrush and outrush, and the solemn official after-wade of the officers, much of the spoil was on the stairs and landing.

"We'll leave all this just as it is," said Towker, "and I'll send a telegram to Mr. Jubb in the morning. I daresay he'll come up at once. It will only shorten his holiday about two days."

This Tolliger thought would be the best course to pursue. Then, suddenly remembering, he exclaimed :

"I wonder what that was I flung at the rascal's head. I hit him," chuckled Tolliger, "for he sung out. I'll go and fetch it up, it fell into the garden."

"Suppose we have a pipe in the summer-house," suggested Towker, "it's a lovely morning."

This being agreed to, the friends proceeded downstairs; Towker placing a kettle of water on his little gas stove with the intention of making a cheering cup of coffee.

James proceeded straight to the summer-house, while his friend commenced to hunt round for the article with which he had so cleverly knocked the burglar into the cistern.

Towker had just got his pipe nicely alight, and was sitting enjoying the delicious air of the early morning, when his attention was called to the curious antics that his fellow-lodger was indulging in.

He was capering about like one born of a race of acrobats and trained by a band of lunatics, and at the same time flourishing some

object over his head in a triumphant manner. Presently he danced into the summer-house, and exhibited to the gasping Towker a parcel which had the inscription on the outside—

“J. T. to E. M.—*Private.*”

“The spoils of the enemy are given into your hand, old fellow,” cried he laughingly, to his astonished companion.

Towker sat looking at the parcel as if fascinated by a snake.

Clearly enough the opportunity to seize his letters was now given to him; but he hesitated. He was either too scrupulous or too timid. Said he: “I believe these must be the identical papers I want to get hold of.”

“Undoubtedly so,” cried Tolliger; “why do you not hasten to secure them?”

“Would it not be an act of theft?” inquired Towker.

“These papers,” replied Tolliger, assuming an air of wisdom, “are feloniously retained by Mrs. Jubb, since she received an equivalent for them in the shape of her own letters to you, which I believe you returned.”

“Your belief is correct,” said Towker.

“With a civil request that she would return yours?”

“Yes.”

“Then seize them at once,” cried Mr. Tolliger, with some asperity.

“I don’t like to do it,” said James sadly.

“Look here,” returned Tolliger. “You have not touched this packet; come upstairs into your own room; I have a scheme.”

Like “Mary’s little lamb,” Towker followed his friend.

“Now,” said Mr. Tolliger, “do you mind me looking at what you have written?”

“No,” replied James; “not a bit.” For well he knew that Tolliger was a man deep in the delicious misery of love, and would not be so much disposed to laugh at the tender strength of some of his expressions, as would some folks, who had not yet arrived at Tolliger’s state, or had been in and waded out on the other side.

“Towker, old fellow, just turn your chair round so that we shall be back to back.” James did so, and then Mr. Tolliger opened the packet, and after a little examination and counting said: “I find a hundred and more letters addressed

to 'Dear Ethel,' 'My dearest Ethel,' 'My own darling Ethel,' 'Angel Ethel,' &c. Every one is signed by 'James Towker,' or 'Your own Jamie,' or 'J. T.,' etc., and all are in the same handwriting."

Towker, blushing, sighed deeply, and said they were the correct documents, and probably all he had sent. Then he inquired:

"Is there anything else in the packet, any—any—poetry—or verse?"

Mr. Tolliger ran the remaining papers rapidly through his fingers, reading here and there a title, "To the one I love," "To my own beloved," "To an angel on earth," "To Ethel," "James to his darling," etc., then said: "About ninety pieces, and all in the same handwriting."

"All there!" gasped Towker. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"Nothing," sternly cried Tolliger. "The time has now come for me to repay the debt I owe; sit where you are, and don't look at the fireplace. You will now be able to swear in any Court of Justice without any fear of perjuring yourself, that you have neither seen the papers, nor handled them, and that you

have not the remotest conception where they are."

"See the morning sun arising,
With a speed that's quite surprising,"

sang Tolliger impromptu, and the walls of the room and the ceiling glowed with a faint red glare, but if it was the morning sun it was rising from a curious spot, viz., Towker's fireplace, and Tolliger had started the expedition with a match, and the rising was accompanied by unaccustomed smoke. The letters had originally been warm, and now they were hot, that was all.

When the sunrise faded, Towker was allowed to look round, and now he knew that his galling fetters were off, and he was as good as at liberty. His manacles were ashes, and his handcuffs dust, and he sat amazed at his good fortune.

He could scarcely believe it, but he rubbed his hands, like a man who anticipates great enjoyment.

He shook hands with Tolliger over and over again, and then the pair adjourned to coffee.

Over this refreshing and invigorating beverage, Mr. Tolliger said :

“There will be no harm in your clearing out your own fire-grate, and if you tip those ashes into an iron pail, and pound them well up, and mix them with water, and then pour the dose down the sink, and well wash the pail out afterwards, it will only be a thoughtful act, and make your room nice, and clean, and tidy. Mrs. Jubb may suspect you, but you can deny everything with a clean conscience. You did not steal them ; you have not seen them, or touched them, or destroyed them ; and you don't know where they are, and under the circumstances I think you might summon up sufficient courage to say ‘and you don't want to.’ I, of course, shall not be suspected in the matter, because she cannot for one moment think that I know anything of your former relations.”

The little bit of clearing-up James set about directly after finishing his coffee, and not a scrap or grain of burnt paper was left to tell the tale of that small—that joyful sunrise.

Mr. Tolliger was occupying himself in another way, but still in the interests of his

friend. Selecting a few unimportant articles such as pamphlets and odd papers of no value, he dropped them out of the staircase window. Some went on to the kitchen leads, some on to the lid of the cistern, and some into the garden. This made it look as if the thief had made up his mind to have an armful of papers in addition to what he really got away with, and had accidentally dropped some in his anxiety to escape.





CHAPTER XX.

Showing how the captive, having literally sat on his conscience, metaphorically sits on his jailer. “What do you think of that, Mrs. Jubb?” Free at last.

AT THE moment Mr. James Towker arrived in town, he sent a telegram off to Mr. Fielder for Mr. Jubb. He did not know the latter gentleman's address at Yarmouth, but having received a letter from Fielder he was thus enabled to send the news.

Later on in the day he begged three or four hours from the Firm, the cause of all his troubles; and made it his business to seek out the estate he had mentioned to Mr. Tolliger, where small houses were to be had at a tolerably low figure. Here he saw the agent for renting or selling, and at once selected a house and

paid a deposit. "Sixteen miles from Mrs. Jubb," grinned Towker, "and London between us, that will do, I think." Then getting back to London he caught his usual train home.

Mr. Jubb duly received his telegram from Fielder, and with his usual genial roar cried out :

"Oh, Ethel, look at this !"

"Burglary at home, some of your property gone. Police know. Better come home at once."

Mrs. Jubb looked scared, but nothing could be done till they reached home, so what was left of the whisky, etc., was turned over to Jurdon and Co., and Mr. and Mrs. Jubb paid their bill, packed up in a hurry, and got to their abode as soon as possible.

Here, in the early evening, they were greeted by their two lodgers ; and very soon the story of the robbery was told. One little matter of detail was omitted by Tolliger, this was, knocking the thief into the cistern with the packet of letters. This packet he of course kept carefully out of the story, not letting so much as the string with which it was secured appear in his narration.

Mr. Towker—whose name ought to have been mentioned first here, but no matter—began the moving narrative, and related all he knew, concluding thus: “When I saw the fellow armed with a heavy decanter, and with a frightful expression of ferocity on his ugly visage, I immediately thought it would be best to go for the police, and started.”

Then it was that Tolliger chimed in, Mr. Towker finally concluding by describing the appearance the wet thief made as he beat all racing records in his hurry to get well away before the police arrived on the scene.

As Mrs. Jubb expressed her intention of first having tea, and then putting her room straight, the fellow-conspirators sallied forth to spend the evening.

When Mrs. Jubb had finished putting her snugger into something like order, after gathering up all the wreckage from the stairs, and what she found in the garden, her mortification knew no bounds. The loss of two or three small articles of jewellery and a few spoons and forks, naturally enough vexed her, but the disappearance of Mr. Towker’s love-letters and poems half maddened her. She

felt furious, and yet she knew she must dissemble.

There was a possibility that the thief had taken the packet, for "Private" was written on the outside, and the larcenous disturber of her nest might have considered it worth looking over.

On the other hand, she had great reason to suspect that Mr. Towker, when the room was open and the things flung about, had seen and secured the precious parcel. She had undeniably shown her hand when she boasted of the possession of the papers, and the use she intended to make of them, in the event of her unhappy captive attempting to regain his liberty.

And now these documents were gone, and probably for ever. What could she do? This is what she eventually made of the situation:

"If he says nothing about leaving," she ruminated, "I shall still profess to have the letters; if he gives me notice I shall accuse him of the theft, and endeavour to incite Jubb to have him prosecuted."

She felt it was no use trusting to her husband to inflict chastisement upon the body of

his lodger, for the two men were on the best terms. Anyway, the affair was full of spiky vexation, and the lady bit her nails and gnawed her lip viciously.

When Mr. Tolliger arrived home for the night, shortly before eleven o'clock, he found the Jubbs sitting up talking together.

As their sitting-room door was a little way open, Mr. Tolliger took the liberty of rapping thereon with his knuckles. Then he inquired: "Is there much missing, Mrs. Jubb?" The words went inside, but the grimace, which happened at the same moment, stayed outside. Whether a little of the varnish off Tolliger's grin adhered to the words as they passed his lips, and so escaped with them into the room, cannot be determined, but Mrs. Jubb answered with some asperity: "Nothing of yours, sir!"

Tolliger heard Mr. Jubb utter a good-humoured growl of remonstrance at his wife's manner, and at the same moment the street-door opened, and in walked Towker. A wink from Tolliger, who placed one forefinger across the other, and pointed with one of his ears at Jubb's parlour door, informed our friend James

that Mrs. Jubb was inside, and by no means in a good temper.

"Won't you come in a minute?" cried Jubb, as he rose and opened the door. "You mustn't mind my wife; she's a good deal upset over this robbery, and we've travelled a long way to-day."

"I am going to retire, Mr. Jubb," said Ethel, rising from her seat. "I am tired; if I were you I should not stay up long. You've had quite enough to-day. It's rather late to begin drinking and smoking again. We must keep one man in the house sober, or else we may have doors left open as well as windows."

This was so clear an insinuation that the fellow-lodgers had arrived home the previous night in a state of intellectual decomposition produced by a severe course of alcoholic treatment, that the accused individuals bounded from their chairs.

"Mrs. Jubb!" cried little Towker, in a passion; "you are quite mistaken. We were as sober as if we'd been to—a—a—a—Temperance meeting." This was a happy thought of Towker's. He could not have mentioned a

better place, and at the same time it reminded Jubb of the secret Towker possessed concerning a certain oration with experiments.

Tolliger, too, warmly denied the unwarrantable insinuation, but Mrs. Jubb marched off with her head in the air.

Mr. Jubb was greatly annoyed at his wife's display of temper, and apologised all round, but he could not persuade either of his lodgers to stay and have a glass with him.

They did, however, break just one bottle upstairs, to have a quiet chuckle at the way Ethel was playing into Towker's hands.

"Capital!" grinned James. "That was just what I wanted; I shall give her notice in the morning. Jubb will, of course, put it down to her insult. I've taken a place."

"I shall hook it too," frowned Tolliger, "as soon as I can find what suits me. Hang it all, I can't stand her much longer."

When James passed Jubb's bedroom door in the morning he heard his landlord executing a solo on the nose. This satisfied him that Jubb was fast asleep, and he felt contented, for he feared that warm words might pass between himself and Mrs. Jubb. That lady stood at

her parlour door watching for Mr. Towker, and as soon as he descended the stairs she started to express her sorrow for saying what she did overnight. It was a new thing for Ethel to appear in an apologetic attitude to any one, but more especially to Towker. He was surprised, and so was she at what she was doing, but she felt it necessary.

She was bitterly mad with herself for insinuating that Towker was intoxicated since she had now given him real cause for leaving her establishment, and his bonds were gone. Did he know it? She feared he did.

Mr. Towker after hearing what Ethel had to say simply bowed, and placed a small note in her hand, which she glanced at and saw was a week's notice; it simply contained the date and the words:

“MADAM,

“I intend to quit possession of your apartments this day week.

“JAMES TOWKER.

“MRS. JUBB.”

The lady glared at the note, then at her

lodger, and then said with a look of deep meaning :

“Do you?”

“I do!” replied the bold Towker.

“Very well,” said Mrs. Jubb. “Then, of course, you know the steps I shall take?”

“If you mean that you intend to acquaint Mr. Jubb with the fact that we were once engaged,” said Towker, “and thereby frighten me, I simply say, do your worst. I go fearless! Your husband and myself are on the best of terms, and in addition to that, I may say that I have been enabled to do Mr. Jubb some little service, which has had the effect of cementing our friendship. In fact, if you feel a difficulty in opening your campaign, I shall be very much pleased to assist you by introducing myself to Mr. Jubb as your sweetheart of former days.”

Here was wormwood and gall to Mrs. Jubb. Clearly this brass-faced lodger must have obtained possession of the letters and poems. Should she accuse him? She would.

Pointing her finger at him, she hissed between her teeth, the one word,

“Thief!”

Towker drew back and turned red. He felt very much inclined to convert his finger into a pointer and cry "Liar!" but he left the inclination alone, and simply said:

"I thank you!"

That Mr. Towker knew of the disappearance of the letters Ethel had now no doubt, but of course he would deny it.

"Before you go, Mr. Towker," said the lady, assuming a calmness she did not feel, "I want to ask you one question."

Towker whispered to himself to be careful, and waited.

"The question is this," continued Mrs. Jubb: "What have you done with the property you abstracted from my room the night before last?"

"I fail to understand you," said Towker coldly. "If you mean to insinuate that I stole your spoons, etc., you are most infamously and libellously mistaken."

"I did not refer to spoons, although the missing articles are certainly of a spooney character. I refer to your letters to me, sir, written some years ago. They are my property, and I insist upon their return, if you do not

wish to be apprehended and lodged in a felon's cell."

"Oh, you've lost the letters, have you?" said James, with a grin. "Well, I can't say I'm sorry to hear it."

"Produce them, sir," said Mrs. Jubb hotly; "produce them immediately!"

"I cannot produce them," said Mr. Towker, "for the best of reasons. I do not know where they are." Then he continued quickly, for fear he should forget his lesson and, somehow, drag in Tolliger by the heels or ears. "I have not stolen the letters, nor even seen them, so perhaps you had better have another search, and then you may find them."

"I don't believe you," cried Ethel fiercely.

"Belief or unbelief does not affect the case," replied James philosophically. "What I say I am perfectly ready to swear to. Any way, whether you have the precious documents or not, that note in your hand expresses my final determination."

"At all events," hissed Mrs. Jubb, "I can expose your villainy to Mr. Jubb and your various friends, and to your dear Isabel."

"It can scarcely fail to strike a lady of

your intelligence," said Mr. Towker, with a luxurious pomposity born of new courage, "that this exposure, as you term it, would compromise yourself to an infinitely greater degree than it could possibly compromise me."

"I fail to understand you," returned Ethel, with hauteur served up on ice.

"I will explain," said Mr. Towker, with a benevolent smile. "Mr. Jubb and my wife Isabel are entirely ignorant of your real feelings towards me. Your conduct in their presence has been composed of courtesy and friendliness. To your husband you have denounced your former lover as a monster, a hypocrite, and a villain. What could Mr. Jubb think of such perfection of duplicity? Let him remain in blissful ignorance of this monstrous hypocrisy you have been practising for months, if you desire to retain his affection or even esteem. If he knew all, his trust in you would be shaken for ever. What do you think of that, Mrs. Jubb?"

"How about yourself, sir?" inquired the lady, colouring. "Do you think Mr. Jubb will like you any better for staying in his house all this while without acquainting him

of the relation in which you formerly stood towards his wife? Will he look upon you with unbounded confidence, or will he not view you as a hypocritical worm?"

Towker still smiled, for was he not going to leave in a week?

"You forget, Mrs. Jubb," said he, "that the nature of your explanation will prove the truth of mine. I came here unwittingly, and remained here unwillingly; so you can do as you please. Good morning."

From the office that day Mr. Towker despatched the following note to his wife, which that lady read the next morning with some surprise:

"MY DEAR ISABEL,

"I trust that both yourself and dear baby are well, and that your mother is making progress towards convalescence. I find things very dull without you and the little one.

"I have one or two items of news that will doubtless surprise you. In the first place, we have had a visit from a burglar.

"Do not be alarmed, my dearest, he did not shoot any one, nor did he get much prey. I was sincerely thankful that Mr. Tolliger was

in the house, since his presence gave me a certain amount of courage; not much, perhaps, but a little. We did not catch the thief, but we managed to frighten him away. The few articles he stole belonged to the Jubbs, who were at Yarmouth. We sent a telegram, and they returned the next day.

“The next thing I have to tell you, will, I dare say, surprise you as much as the first. I have given notice to leave in a week’s time, and have secured a nice little house all to ourselves, dearest, and baby, of course. This may not please you to read; but I assure you, my dear Isabel, that Mrs. Jubb was extremely disagreeable over the little burglary.

“She quite coarsely and insultingly hinted that both Mr. Tolliger and myself were thoroughly intoxicated, and even went so far as to almost accuse *me* of being in league with the thief.

“This of course I could not stand, so gave notice; Mr. Tolliger too intends to leave shortly. I shall write the moment I go, instructing you as to the new address, and how to get there. If you write me the day and time you are coming home, I will meet you at the station. Possibly I shall be able to get a day off, and

run down on the Saturday afternoon, and bring you up on the Monday.

“I must now conclude with my best wishes and love to all.

“From your loving husband,

“JAMES.”

Mrs. Jubb accepted Towker's view of the situation, and held her tongue.

Mr. Jubb thinking that Towker was leaving in consequence of Ethel's rash language, growled in his good-tempered fashion till one might have thought he'd swallowed a small and mild thunderstorm.

A certain fine new meerschaum pipe which Mr. Tolliger often smoked, and at length successfully coloured, bore on a silver band the words “From J. T.”

* * * *

On a drizzling midday in the early part of September, a solitary wayfarer was crossing a common on his road to the railway station.

The man may be said to be homeless, for his goods are in a big van packed for a sixteen-mile journey, yet the wayfarer smiles.

No umbrella, no overcoat—all in the van ;

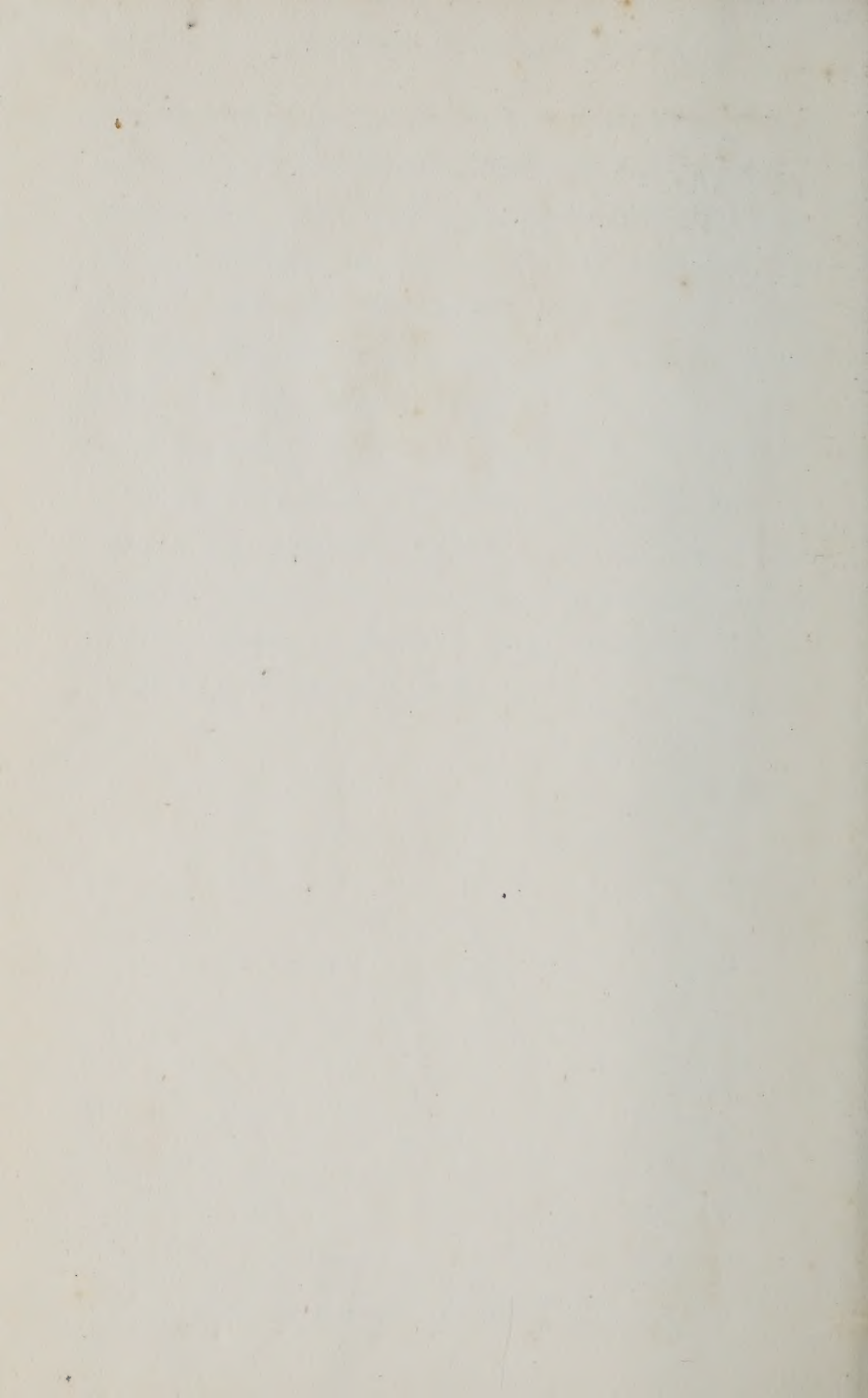
the rain coming down, a dreary, melancholy fog on duty; wife and child scores of miles away. Alone! not even a dog for company; nothing to eat, nothing to drink. Surely the man is crazy; he claps his hands and laughs aloud. The lunatic sings, with a wink in his eye and a finger on his nose, he sings:

“My sweetheart when a boy.”

Now he pauses; he looks round; no one is near; the demented wretch is dancing; no partner, no music, save the “mournful voice of the breeze.” Wonder not, brethren. It is Towker, and he is FREE!

THE END.

Stirling, January 1894





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